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New Vanguard

Confederate Raider 1861–65

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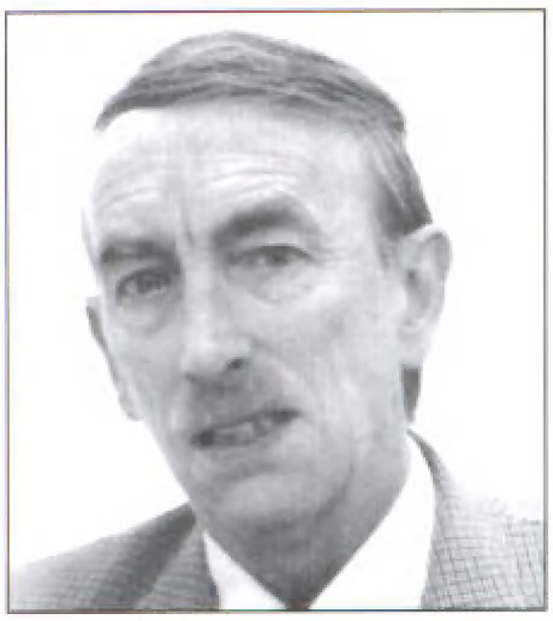

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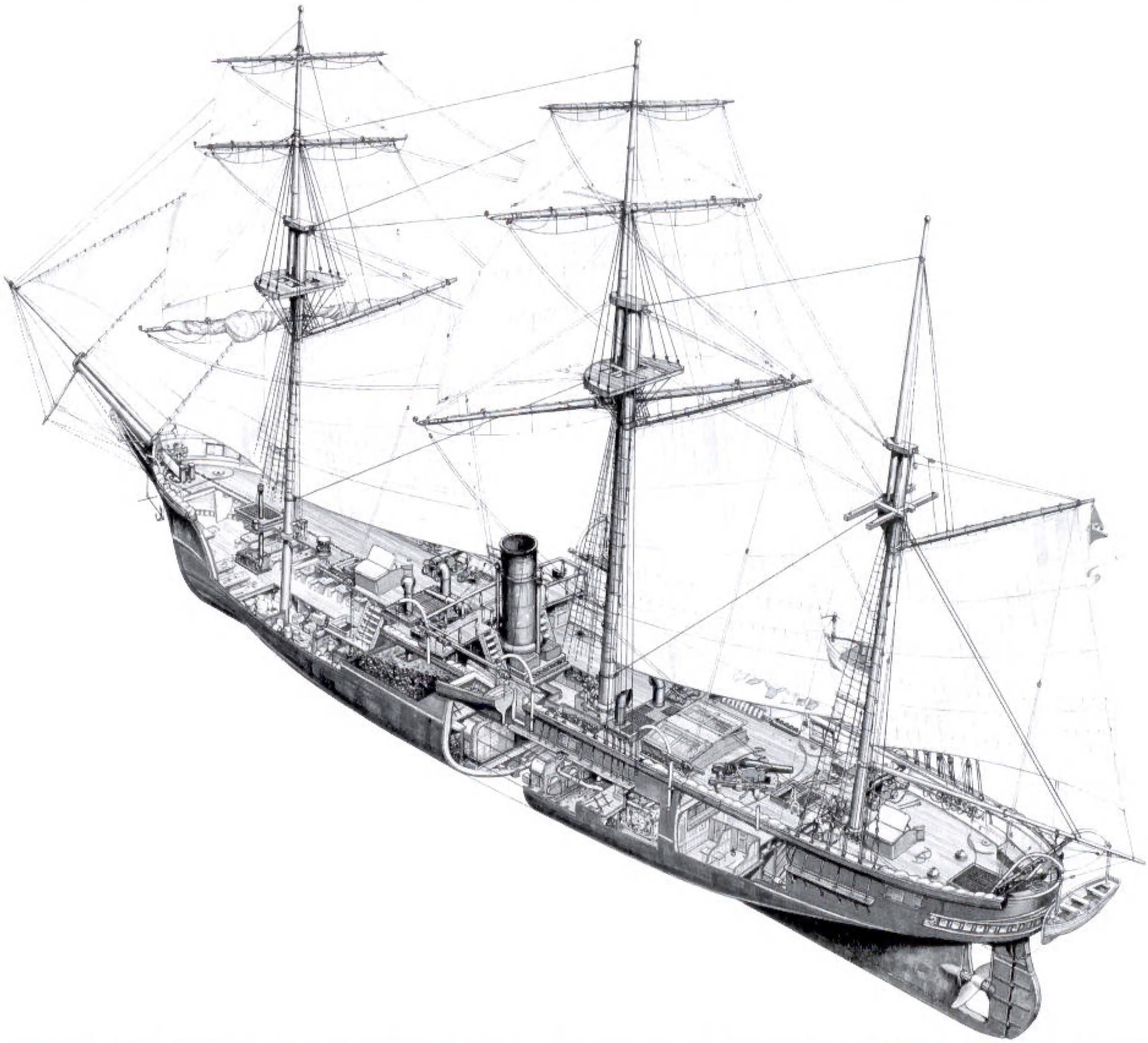

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CHC = Clyde Hensley Collection

CONFEDERATE RAIDER 1861–65

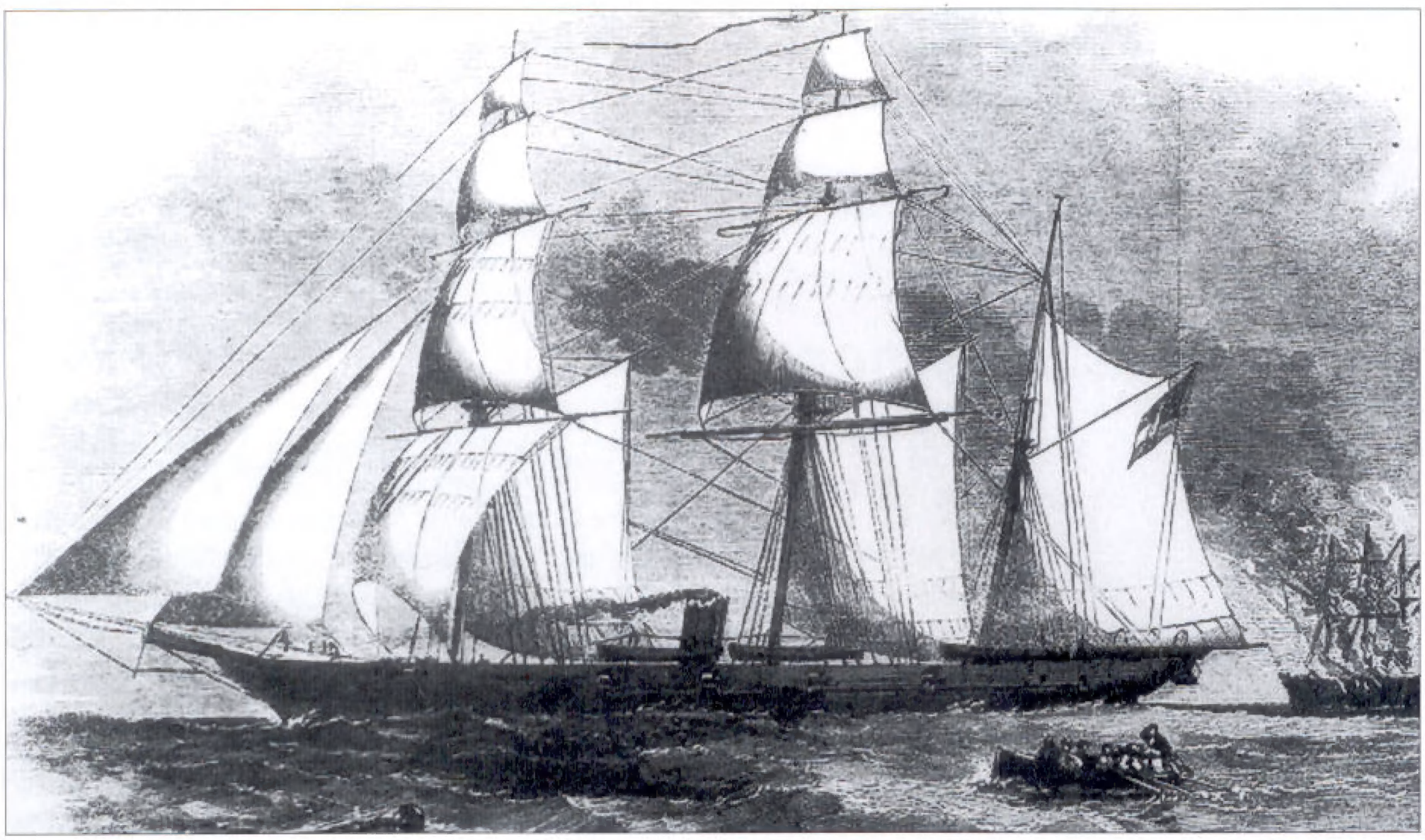
INTRODUCTION

When the Confederate States seceded from the Union in 1861, the newly formed Confederate government was ill prepared for the struggle ahead. The Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen R. Mallory, was faced with the dual problems of defending the long Southern coastline from naval attack, and taking the war to the enemy. Mallory hoped to cause sufficient losses to Union shipping to force Union political leaders to the peace table. Even before the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April 1861, he had developed a three-pronged strategy to counter the Union threat. Firstly, he elected to use the limited industrial capacity of the Confederacy to produce ironclad warships, which would neutralize the potentially overwhelming size of the Union fleet. He also decided to arm these naval leviathans with rifled guns, designed by the Southern ordnance expert, John M. Brooke.

Secondly, he organized the defense of Southern ports through the use of fortifications, mines (then known as "torpedoes"), and the ironclads. This combination proved remarkably successful given the forces arrayed against the Confederacy. Union naval strategy involved the slow strangulation of the Southern States through the imposition of a naval blockade. In effect this prevented the Confederates from gathering sufficient forces in any one port to launch a co-ordinated naval attack on the Union forces, although relatively ineffective local attacks on the blockading squadrons were undertaken.

Captain Raphael Semmes, CSN, photographed in Southampton (Great Britain), just days after the sinking of the CSS *Alabama* at the hands of the USS *Kearsage* (June 19, 1864). Semmes went on to become a Rear Admiral, and was granted the rank of Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army during the Appomattox Campaign of 1865. (Author's Collection)

Finally, in order to cause damage to the enemy, the only offensive option available to Mallory was the use of commerce raiders. He believed that northern maritime commerce was susceptible to attack by Confederate high-seas raiders, and that the predominantly maritime economies of New



The CSS *Alabama*, a line engraving first published in *Harper's Weekly* (1862). The original caption referred to the vessel as the "pirate *Alabama*, alias 290," and noted that the engraving was certified as an accurate depiction of the raider by Captain Hagar of the *Brilliant*, whose vessel was captured by the *Alabama* on October 3, 1862. (CHC)

England could be brought to their knees through the loss of their shipping. This would then lead them to put pressure on President Lincoln to sue for peace. Traditionally, this kind of strategy had involved the use of "privateers;" privately owned high-seas raiders who operated under license from the government for the duration of the war, rather like legalized pirates. What Mallory envisaged was the creation of a small fleet of raiders operated directly by the Confederate Navy, not by authorized civilian captains and ship-owners. Mallory's employment of custom-built high-seas raiders would prove an effective stratagem, although it never succeeded in bringing the Union government to the peace table, largely due to the single-minded drive of President Lincoln. The history of these ships, the men who commanded them, and the effect they had on the war is one of the most fascinating aspects of the naval history of the Civil War, and is undoubtedly the one which is considered the most romantic.

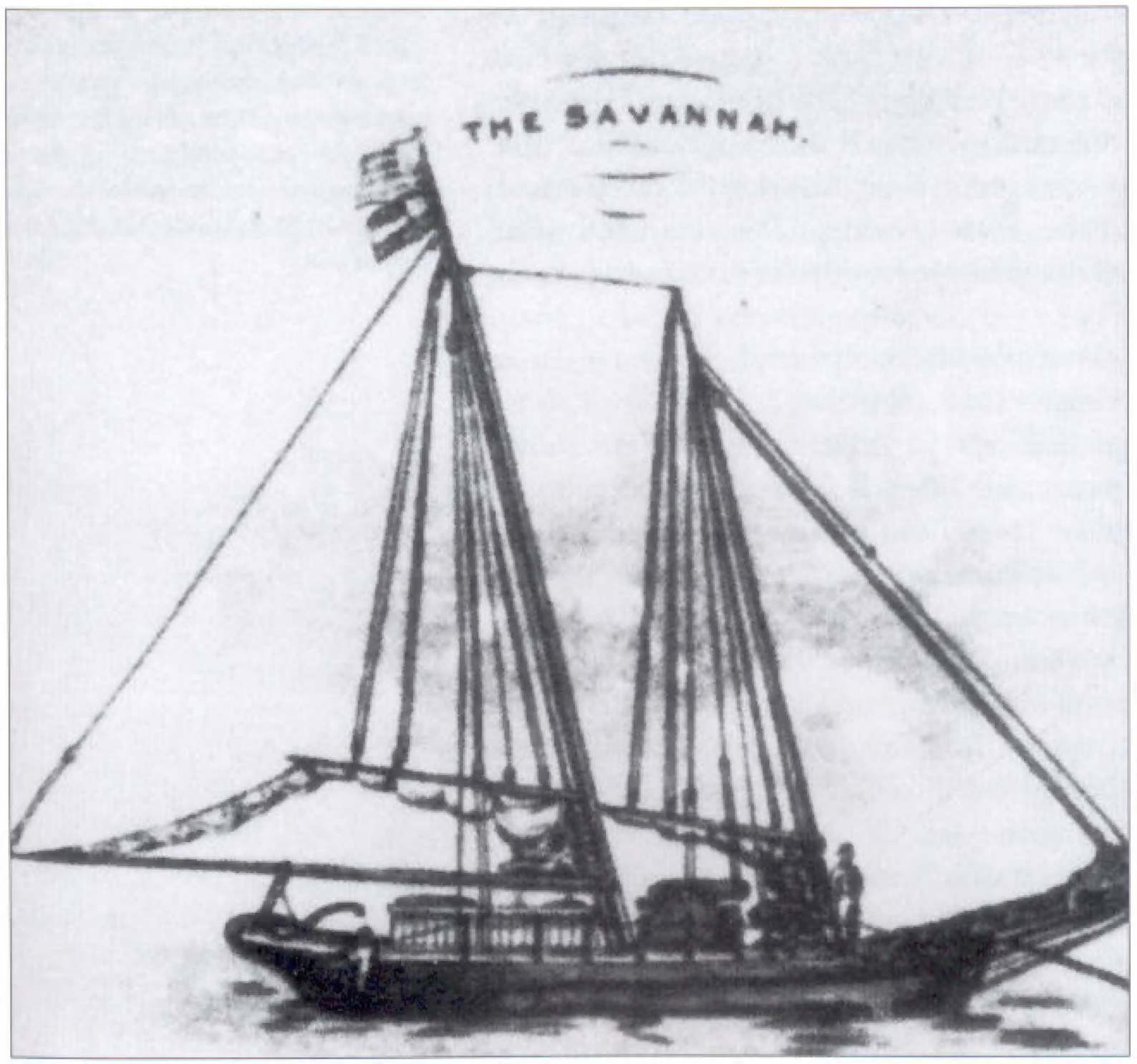
THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE RAIDING FLEET

In most maritime nations, the age-old stratagem of privateering had fallen into disuse, despite its proven historical effectiveness. During the War of 1812 between the United States and Britain, both sides made extensive use of privateers issuing "letters of marque" (privateering licenses) throughout the war. In 1812, the British mercantile marine was the largest in the world, making the American deployment of privateers an effective strategy. Unfortunately the American merchant fleet proved equally vulnerable to attack, and the losses inflicted on New England ship-owners led to the paralysis of American commerce.

Eventually, New England lobbyists forced the US Government to negotiate a peace treaty with Great Britain.

Stephen Mallory was well aware of the effectiveness of privateering, however, his options were limited by international opinion. In the decades since the War of 1812 privateering had fallen into disuse, and the majority of maritime powers had outlawed the practice in the naval treaty known as the Declaration of Paris (1856). This treaty also limited the use of commerce raiders of any type. Although Mallory realized the importance of securing British or French support for the Confederacy, he also knew his strategic options were limited. He was opposed to the use of privateers, and, although President Davis signed several privateering "letters of marque" during the war, the commerce raiders employed by Mallory would predominantly be owned and operated by the Confederate Navy. For Mallory, the opportunities presented to commerce raiders were considerable. During the two decades preceding the outbreak of the war, the mercantile fleet of the United States had enjoyed a period of dramatic expansion. Between 1845 and 1861 both the total tonnage and the number of American-flagged vessels had doubled in size. By 1860, the merchant fleet was growing by an average of 100,000 tons per year. This was a boom period, and ports such as New York, Boston, San Francisco and New Orleans were filled with shipping flying the American flag. The total size of the American merchant marine was also close to overtaking the merchant navy of Britain, which until that point had been the largest flag-carrying merchant fleet ever seen on the world's oceans.

Mallory's distrust for commercial privateers stemmed from the lack of control he could enforce on their activities. At a time when world opinion could be colored by a single event, both Mallory and President Davis were aware that the ultimate fate of the Confederacy rested on its recognition by the European powers. The use of state-owned commerce raiders rather than privateers ensured that Mallory could retain a greater degree of control over their activities. Also, privateering required the existence of friendly ports for the privateers to take their prizes back to. As the leading European powers enforced strict neutrality, their ports were placed off-limits to Confederate privateers, while the increasing effectiveness of the blockade of the South denied the use of Southern ports to privateers. Eventually, these



The Confederate privateer schooner *Savannah* was typical of the majority of "private men-of-war" who patrolled the Southern coastline during 1861. She carried a single 18-pdr. smoothbore gun. This sketch was drawn after her capture by the USS *Perry* on June 3, 1861. (CHC)

limitations led to the collapse of the limited Confederate privateering fleet. By contrast, the high-seas raiders planned by Mallory needed no home port, as they were designed to destroy commerce, not to capture prizes. As such they were a strategic weapon, forcing the Union to devote considerable energy to countering them, while extending the scope and impact of the war beyond the coastal waters of the Americas. Above all, these Confederate raiders were designed to operate in accordance with the terms of the Declaration of Paris, and thereby avoided any potential conflict of interests with Britain and France.

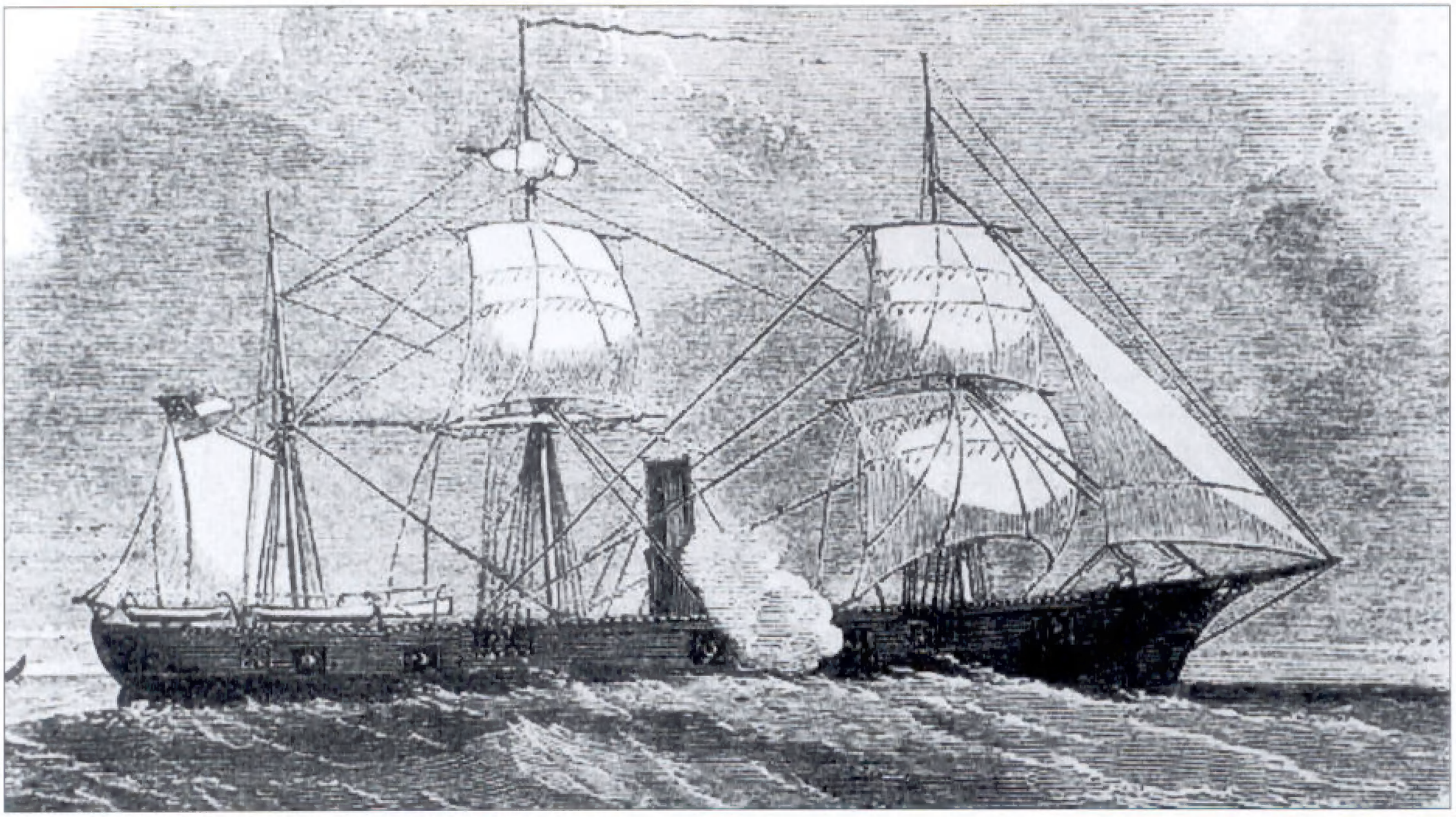
Mallory was also well aware that the ship-building capacity of the Confederacy was limited, and that the few facilities available would be hard-pressed to meet the needs of his ironclad program, let alone furnish the South with a fleet of commerce raiders. Consequently, he initiated his policy by sending two Confederate agents to Europe, with the intention of using foreign shipyards to produce the commerce raiders he required. From that point on, although a handful of Confederate raiders were built or converted in Southern ports, the majority of the raider fleet would come from outside the Confederacy. These two Confederate agents, the former naval officer James D. Bulloch and the serving officer Lieutenant James A. North CSN, both planned to start their search in Britain, where there was widespread sympathy for the Southern cause. As a neutral country, British shipbuilders were unable to build warships for foreign powers without the approval of the government. Unless the British government recognized the Confederate States, this approval would not be forthcoming. This ensured that Bulloch and North were forced to disguise their efforts from both Union spies and British officials.

James Dunwoody Bulloch, the enterprising Confederate naval agent in Britain. His remit was later extended to cover ship procurement throughout Europe. Bulloch was responsible for the building of both the CSS *Florida* and the CSS *Alabama*. (Author's Collection)

In the Confederacy, Mallory enlisted the help of the naval officer Raphael Semmes to locate vessels that could be converted into commerce raiders. He found the 437-ton passenger packet *Habana* in New Orleans, Louisiana. This vessel had been built in Philadelphia in 1857, and had served the past three years sailing between New Orleans and Havana, Cuba. On Semmes' recommendation the Confederate government purchased the packet in April 1861, and work began on her conversion into the Confederacy's first commerce raider. Two months later, in June 1861, she was commissioned into service as the CSS *Sumter*, and Semmes was named as her commander. The *Sumter* slipped through the Union blockade off the Mississippi Delta in late June, and began the first commerce-raiding cruise of the war. This eight-month spree resulted in the capture of 18 Union prizes. Four months later a second raider set sail from Charleston, South Carolina. The CSS *Nashville* was originally a New York sidewheel passenger steamer, which had been impounded in Charleston during the attack on Fort Sumter. The eight year old vessel was converted into a warship with the addition of a pair

Commander Raphael Semmes, CSN (center), surrounded by the officers of the CSS *Sumter*, photographed in Gibraltar after the completion of their cruise in January 1862. Note that all the officers are shown wearing old-style US Naval uniforms. (CHC)

of 12-pdr. howitzers, and was commissioned into the Confederate Navy in October. Her original mission was to ferry a Confederate diplomatic mission to Europe, but at the last minute she was re-designated a commerce raider. Following her breakout from Charleston, she arrived in the British port of Southampton, where she caused something of a diplomatic furore when she became the first warship to sail into a European port flying the Confederate flag. This resulted in the tacit recognition of Confederate warships as bona fide belligerents in Europe, not as outlaw vessels, a stance that was argued by Union diplomats. It soon became apparent to Stephen Mallory that apart from the CSS *Sumter* and the CSS *Nashville*, there were no vessels in any Southern port that were ideally suited for service as high-seas commerce raiders. Given that the Union blockade of the Southern coastline was deemed an illegal act by the Confederacy, and faced with the seeming reluctance of the European maritime powers to recognize the Confederacy, Mallory and President Davis considered the issuing of privateering "letters of marque." Only a few private ship owners considered such a venture, as using ships as blockade runners was more profitable. However, there were a few notable exceptions. In New Orleans the ironclad gunboat *Manassas* was converted from a merchant vessel, but was purchased by the Confederate government before it could begin her privateering cruise. Slightly more successful was the small New York steamer *Calhoun*, which was converted into a privateer in a New Orleans yard in May 1861. Over the next six months she cruised in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico as a licensed privateer, before being purchased by the Confederate Navy as a gunboat in November 1861.

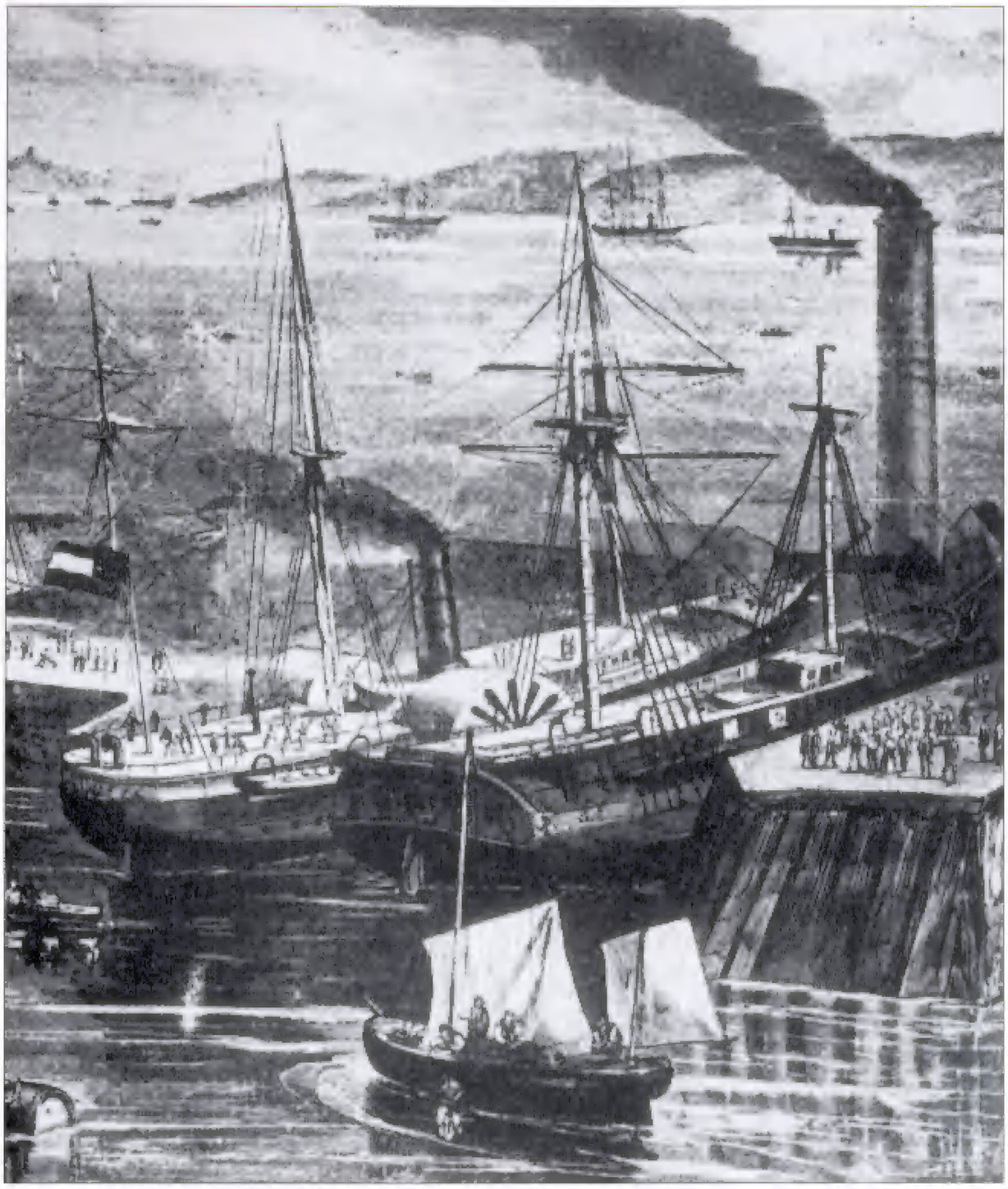


The CSS *Sumter*, from an engraving published in *Harper's Weekly*, 1862. A slow and somewhat unseaworthy raider, she nevertheless demonstrated the potential of commerce raiding to the Confederate government. (Author's Collection)

Only one other official commerce raider began her career in the Americas. The specially commissioned, London-built blockade runner *Edith* was purchased by the Confederate government in 1864, in Wilmington, North Carolina. Commissioned as the CSS *Chickamauga* in October the same year, she slipped through the Union blockade to cruise in the North Atlantic. However, she turned out to be a poor raiding vessel, and returned to port after only two months. With the CSS *Sumter* an honorable exception, the conversion of existing vessels into commerce raiders was less than successful, partially due to the strengthening of the Union blockade in 1861 and 1862. Consequently, nearly all Confederate efforts to create a fleet of commerce raiders would revolve around the purchase or construction of ships in Europe.

JAMES BULLOCH'S BRITISH RAIDERS

Given that the Confederate Navy was forced to look towards Europe for the supply of suitable commerce raiders, the naval mission of James Bulloch and James North became of paramount importance. While North concentrated on the purchase of ironclad warships (with a singular lack of success), Bulloch, a civilian in the Naval Department and a maternal uncle of future American President Theodore Roosevelt, devoted his energies to the commissioning of commerce raiders. He took passage to Liverpool in Great Britain, a port renowned for its shipbuilding excellence and the entrepreneurial skills of its shipbuilders and ship owners. Arriving in the city on June 4, 1861, he quickly established contacts with local companies. Confederate currency was not recognized in Britain, so Bulloch had to wait until quantities of gold were shipped to his British bank before Liverpool shipbuilders would consider undertaking any project. Once his funding was secured, Bulloch still had

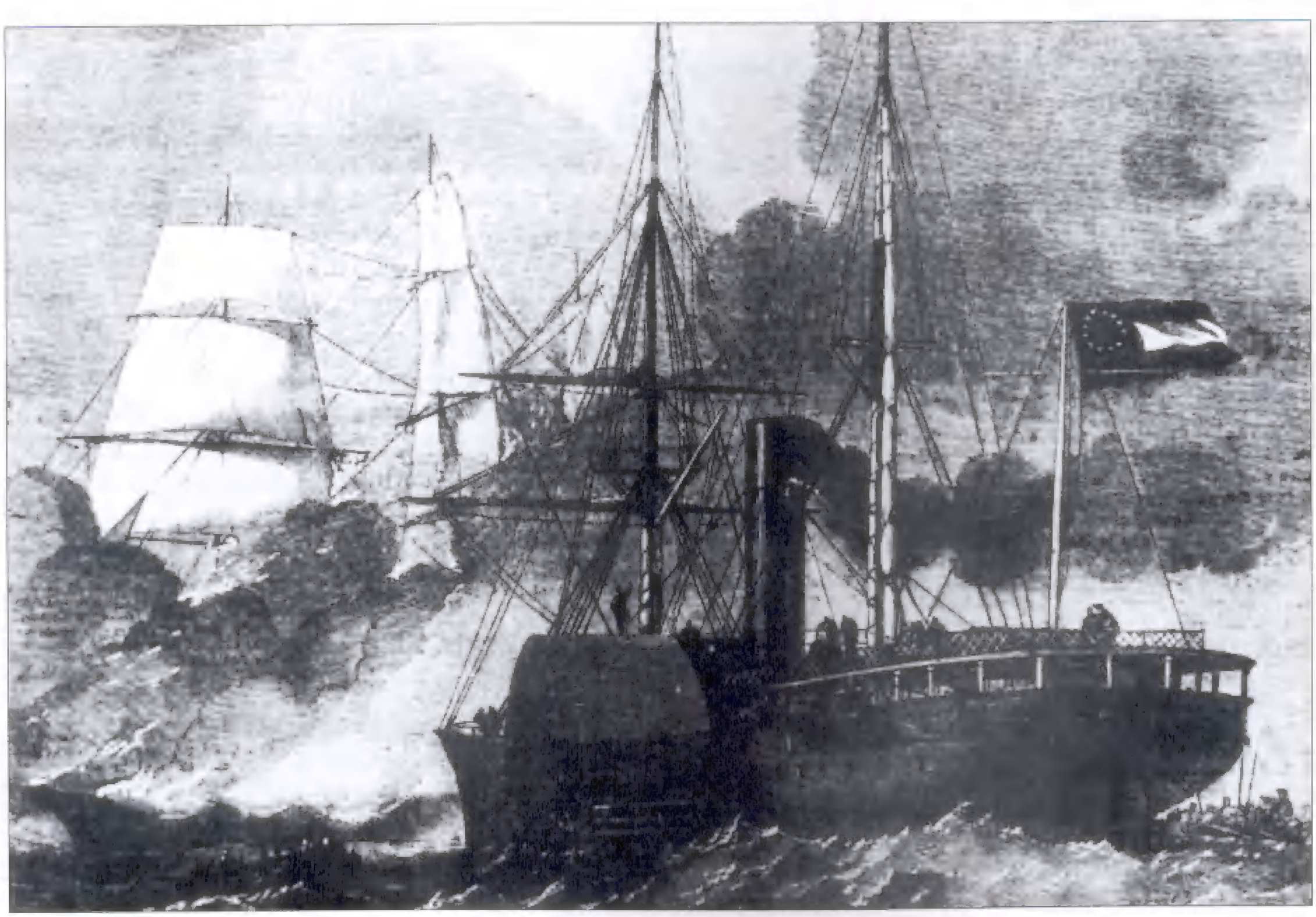


The Confederate raider CSS *Nashville* pictured in Southampton, flying the Confederate flag, in December 1861. Her visit caused a diplomatic uproar. The steam sloop USS *Tuscarora* is the central of the three ships in the middle distance, waiting for the *Nashville* to sail. (Author's Collection)

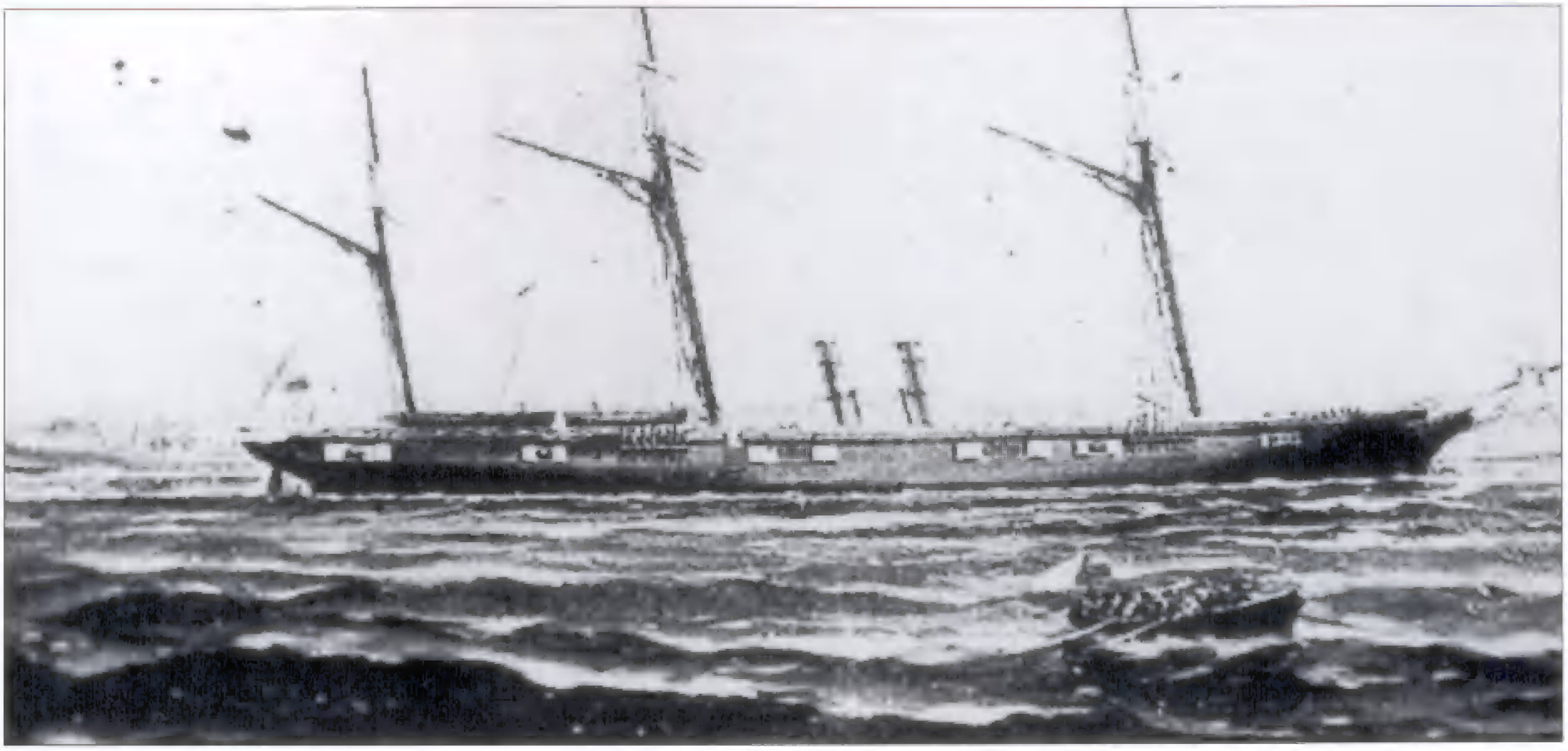
to find ways to circumvent British law, and to outmanoeuver the Union lawyers and diplomats sent to Britain to sabotage his mission. The British government had adopted a policy of strict neutrality, a stance that was clarified following the diplomatic furor surrounding the arrival of the CSS *Nashville* in Southampton in November 1861. This ensured that any supplies for the Confederate Navy were bound by the strictures of the Foreign Enlistment Act, a redundant law that had remained on the British statutes since 1812. This law was created to limit the involvement of British subjects in the independence movements of South America. Under its terms, it was illegal for a British subject to build, equip or to operate a vessel intended for use as a warship or belligerent by another power. In effect, this meant that it was illegal to build warships or commerce raiders for the Confederacy. Bulloch found a number of ways around the problem. First, he hired a team of Liverpool lawyers who claimed they could "sail a fleet" through the Act. They were virtually as good as their word, as on all of the 34 counts where the US Ambassador pressed for legal action against Bulloch on account of infringement of the terms of the Act, the British courts ruled that there was no case to answer. In addition, Bulloch stoutly maintained that his contractors had no knowledge of the final use for the vessels they were building for him.

A fictitious client placed orders through Bulloch, and all transactions were paid for in cash. By purchasing all warlike items such as guns, powder, gun carriages, shot and boarding weapons from a range of suppliers, the legal risks were reduced even further. The most important part of the deception was that the ship, its armament, and its crew were all gathered together outside British territorial waters, therefore there was no risk that the ship could legally be deemed part of an "armed expedition," as defined in the Act. Bulloch and his team of lawyers consistently outsmarted the Union diplomats sent to prevent him from carrying out his mission. He also avoided any direct confrontation with the British government by skirting as close as possible to the definition of legal infringement of the Act, without actually crossing the line into illegal activity.

Once a ship was ready for service, it would sail under the British merchant ensign as a regular merchant vessel, then rendezvous with a supply ship in a pre-arranged remote location. There, the crew, armament and the stores required for a long cruise would be moved across to the vessel. Once everything was ready, the title of the ship was transferred in a legally approved fashion to its new owners, the Confederate Navy. At that point the niceties of British or maritime law no longer bound the raider, and it could be commissioned into Confederate service. After being formally commissioned, the Confederate flag was run up the mast, the supply ship was paid off and returned, and a new Confederate raider was ready to be unleashed.



The raider CSS *Nashville* depicted in the act of destroying the Yankee clipper *Harvey Birch* after encountering her off the Irish coast on November 19, 1861. The crew were taken prisoner, and released in the British port of Southampton two days later. (Author's Collection)



The raider CSS *Florida*, shown as she appeared during her first cruise, under the command of John Maffitt. This sketch was based on a photograph taken while she visited Bermuda in the summer of 1863, shortly after her successful cruise up the New England coast. (CHC)

Of all his achievements, the commissioning of the CSS *Florida* and the CSS *Alabama* were Bulloch's most spectacular accomplishments in Great Britain. He signed a contract with the Liverpool firm of Fawcett, Preston and Company for the building of a 700-ton, barque-rigged, steam-powered vessel. This was based on the plans of a contemporary Royal Naval gunboat. Officially, the vessel he commissioned was called the *Oreto*, and was earmarked for sale to a client in Sicily. When the *Oreto* sailed from Liverpool on March 22, 1862, with a skeleton British crew, she sailed for the Bahamas instead of Sicily. Once there, she rendezvoused with the British steamer *Bahama*, which carried guns and ammunition. The two vessels were joined by the blockade runner *Gordon*, carrying Captain John Maffitt of the Confederate Navy, and a crew of officers and men. Despite the best attempts of the Union authorities in Nassau to prevent it, the *Oreto* was deemed a merchant vessel by the local authorities, who permitted her to be handed over to a local shipping agent. This firm were in the pay of the Confederate government, and under Confederate orders the *Oreto* sailed to a remote anchorage, where it rendezvoused with a fourth ship, the blockade runner *Prince Albert*, which carried a further nine guns and ammunition. Maffitt supervised the Herculean task of transforming the *Oreto* into a high-seas commerce raider, and finally, on August 17, 1862, the vessel was commissioned into the Confederate Navy, becoming the CSS *Florida*.

An even greater degree of subterfuge was required for Bulloch's next project. In June 1861, work had begun on the construction a new steamer in the Birkenhead (Liverpool) shipyard of John Laird. Designated project "No. 290," the ship was destined to become the most successful Confederate raider of the war. Bulloch later said of Laird's work:

> She [the *Alabama*] was built of the very best materials, copper-fastened and coppered, and was finished in every respect as a first-class ship. I was satisfied in every particular with the manner in which the builders fulfilled their contract, and I believe she was

> as fine a vessel, and as well-found, as could have been turned out in any dockyard in the kingdom, equal to any of Her Majesty's ships of corresponding class in structure and finish, and superior to any vessel of her date in fitness for the purposes of a sea rover with no home but the sea, and no reliable source of supply but the prizes she might take.

If any one vessel has come to typify the Confederate high-seas commerce raider, it is the CSS *Alabama*. Not only was she the most successful of the raiders, but, through the circumstances of her final fight with the USS *Kearsage* off Cherbourg in June 1864, the *Alabama* and her Commander, Raphael Semmes have been immortalized in popular history. There is little doubt that she was a beautiful ship. With a length overall of 220 feet and a beam of under 32 feet, she had a length to breadth ratio of over 7:1, making her long, lean and sleek. Her lines were "symmetrical and fine, her material of the best," according to her Executive Officer, Lieutenant John M. Kell, while her two engines and four boilers were capable of pushing her through the water at a little over 12 knots. In certain circumstances (i.e. with supercharged boilers and a press of sail to assist her), she could attain speeds of just over 15 knots. Kell also noted that she "was built for speed rather than battle." Certainly, when she was designed, James Bulloch envisaged a ship that could evade the majority of Union warships likely to be sent to track her down. She fitted the specifications admirably. Kell also described her as a "perfect steamer," and the reliability of her English-built engines earned her the admiration of both officers and crew. Her clean wooden hull allowed her to be repaired by her own crew, using isolated anchorages, rather than having to rely on repairs carried out in major ports. Her full, barque-rigged, sailing rig extended her radius of operations by reducing her reliance on coal. Similarly, the addition of a device to raise her single screw clear of the water "in a banjo frame," when under sail power alone ensured that her clean hull lines were not compromised by drag from her propeller.

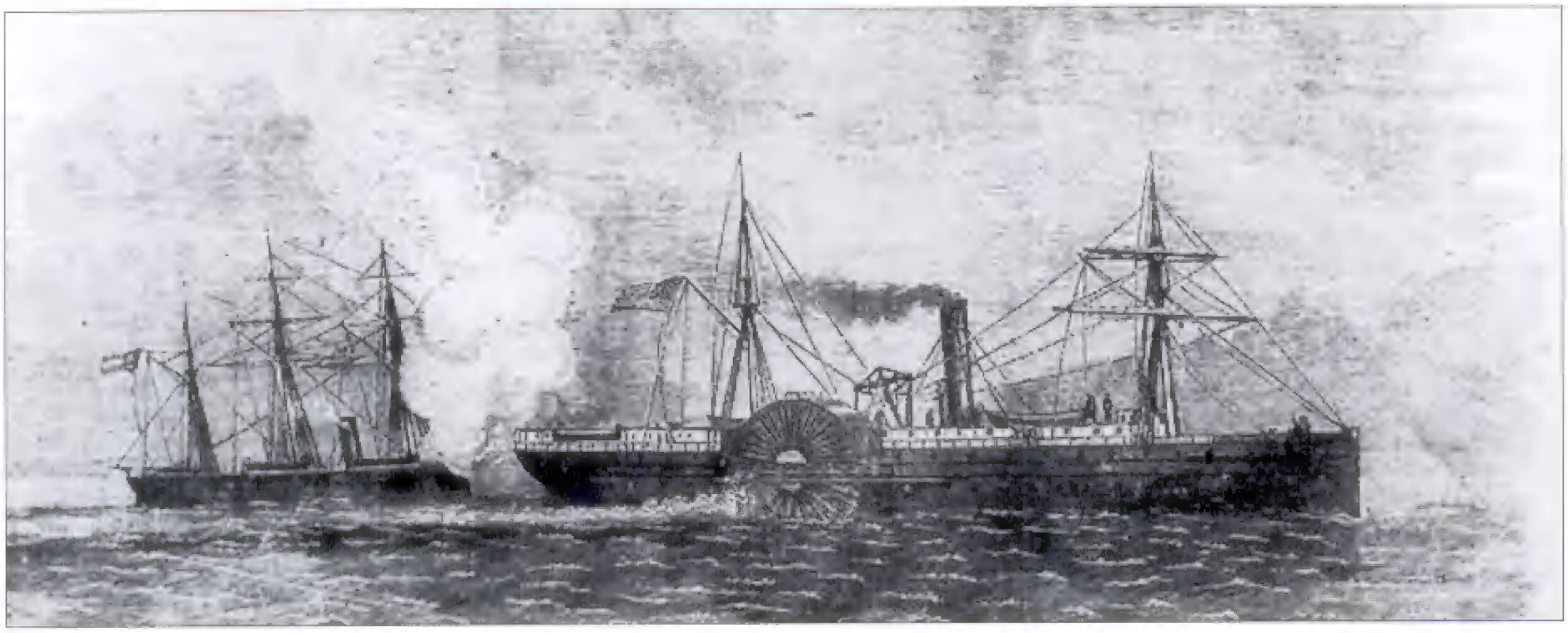
In the unlikely event that a Union warship cornered the CSS *Alabama*, she carried an armament powerful enough to give her the opportunity to fight her way out of trouble. This included two powerful guns mounded on centerline pivots, a 7-in. rifled piece, and a 6-in. smoothbore. In addition, she carried three 32-pdr. smoothbore guns on each broadside, giving her a total armament of eight guns. During her cruise two 24-pdr. rifled pieces were added, having been captured from the Union steamer *Ariel* on December 7, 1862. Most probably these pieces were mounted as broadside pieces (one on each beam) near the stern of the *Alabama*, above the Captain's cabin. As she neared completion in

John Laird, the owner of Laird and Sons Birkenhead Ironworks, across the River Mersey from Liverpool, in the industrial suburb of Birkenhead. The CSS *Alabama* was built by Laird's yard, and Bulloch praised the craftsmanship and professionalism of Laird and his shipbuilders. (Author's Collection)

The CSS *Alabama*, in an engraving based on a photograph taken of the vessel as she conducted her sea trials off Liverpool. In this version, published in a post-war anthology of military and naval anecdotes, the *Alabama* was referred to as a "privateer." (CHC)

Liverpool, it was becoming increasingly difficult to pretend that ship "No. 290" was anything other than the perfect commerce raider.

As the *Oreto* (soon to be the *Florida*) put to sea from Liverpool on March 22, 1862, Union agents in Liverpool realized they had been duped, and that the ship nearing completion at the Laird shipyard was almost certainly going to be used as a Confederate raider. She was launched on May 15, 1862, and was duly christened the *Enrica*. A British captain was hired, and while Bulloch tried to convince everyone that the vessel was a harmless merchant ship destined for service in the West Indies, the truth about the ship was widely known in Liverpool. On June 15, the *Enrica* made a trial voyage into the River Mersey, returning to be prepared for sea. The Union authorities knew they had to act quickly. The US Ambassador to London, Charles F. Adams, gathered incontrovertible evidence that project "No. 290" was in breach of the Foreign Enlistment Act, then presented his findings to Lord Russell, the British Foreign Secretary. On July 20, Adams lodged a legal request that the *Enrica* be seized pending investigation. It seemed almost certain that Bulloch's ship would be impounded, but a bizarre train of events saved her in the nick of time. Adams' request had been passed to Russell's legal counsel in the Foreign Office. Ill health prevented him from taking action immediately, and a Confederate sympathizer in the Foreign Office informed Bulloch on July 26 that his ship was due to be impounded. Bulloch acted immediately, requesting a second sea trial. For the next two days the ship was prepared for sea, and before dawn on July 29, 1862, the *Enrica* sailed to perform her trial, with local guests lining her rails prepared to enjoy the excursion. This was an elaborate ruse designed to foil any Union spies. The guests were transferred onto a tug in the River Mersey, and the *Enrica* sailed on, never to return to Liverpool. The government papers requesting the vessel be impounded were delivered to the yard that same day. Bulloch had masterminded another Confederate coup. The steamer *Agrippina* also sailed from Liverpool the same day, bound for the Azores. On board were Captain Semmes and his crew, together with all the ordnance and ammunition the raider would need on her cruise. Both ships evaded a Union warship sent to intercept them in the Irish Sea, and, rounding the north coast of Ireland, the ships turned south towards the Azores. At Terceira, Semmes took command of

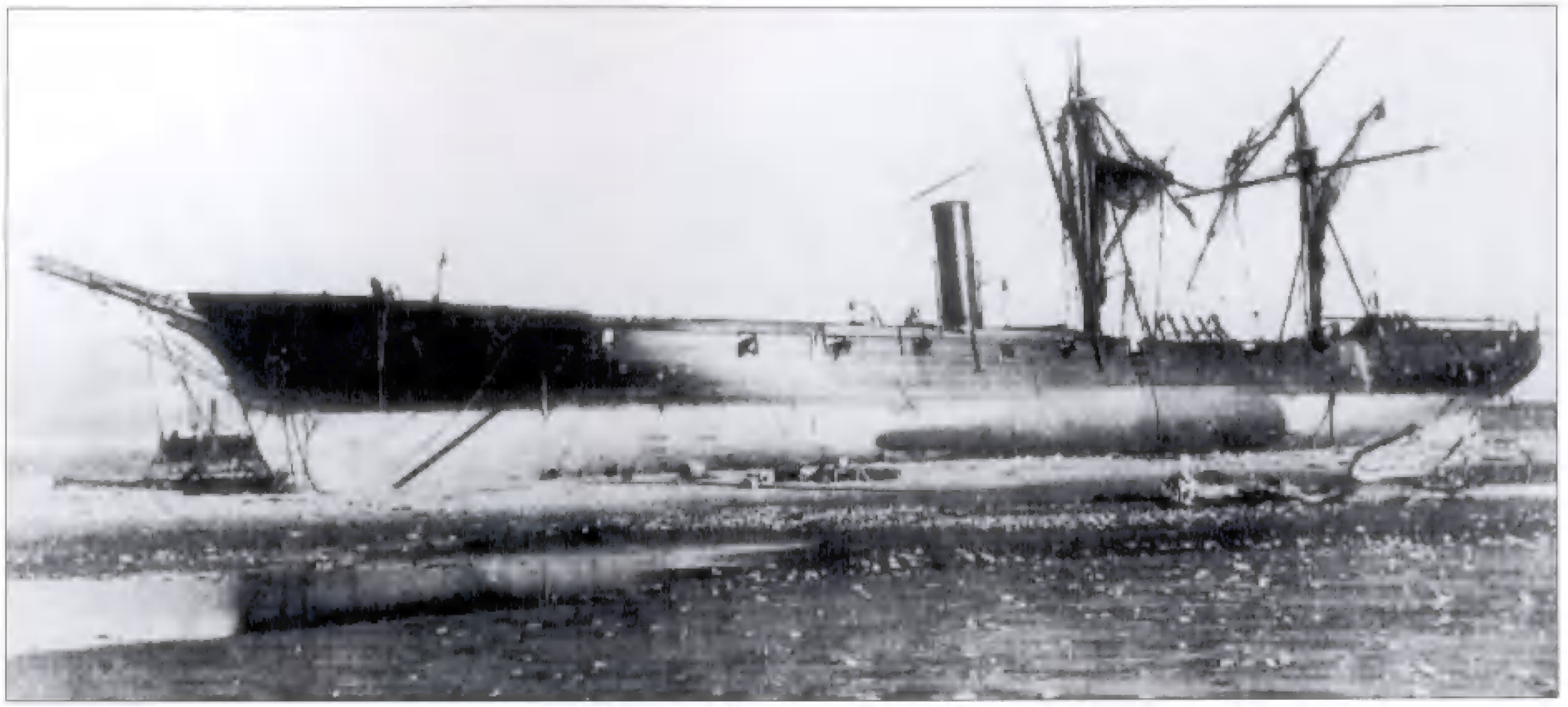


The capture of the Union mail steamer *Ariel* in the Windward Passage off Cuba by the CSS *Alabama*, December 7, 1862. She was carrying 150 US Marines on board when she was captured. The *Ariel* also carried two 24-pdr. rifled guns, which were transferred to the *Alabama* before the mail packet was released "on bond." (Author's Collection)

the ship, allowing Bulloch to return to Liverpool to plan further ventures. On August 24, 1862, the *Enrica* was commissioned into the Confederate Navy, becoming the CSS *Alabama*.

Further commerce raiders would be built in British yards, and the *Georgia*, *Rappahannock* and *Shenandoah* all followed the pattern set by Bulloch, skirting the letter of the law, pretending to be harmless merchantmen until it was too late for the authorities to intervene. In late 1862, Bulloch was sent an assistant, Matthew Fontaine Maury, a Virginian naval officer with a reputation as one of the world's leading oceanographers. Although not an expert in commercial shipping, he was a skilled diplomat and propagandist, allowing him to continue Bulloch's example of "hoodwinking" both the British authorities and the Union agents. However, it was also becoming increasingly difficult for Bulloch to operate, as his twin successes of the *Florida* and the *Alabama* alerted the British government to his plans, and presented Union lawyers and diplomats with considerable ammunition. The *Alexandra*, a small Liverpool-built steamer, was impounded in March 1863, despite a court ruling in favor of Bulloch. The Confederate defeat at the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1–3, 1863) effectively ended the possibility of European recognition of the Confederacy, and British and French attitudes hardened against what their governments saw as the agents of a lost cause. Despite this, Bulloch was able to pull off one more coup. In September 1864, he purchased the well-designed transport steamer *Sea King*. Bulloch arranged a rendezvous between the steamer and the cargo ship *Laurel* off the Azores in October 1864, and once more, men and guns supplied by Bulloch transformed a British merchant vessel into a powerful commerce raider. On October 19, 1864, the vessel was renamed the *Shenandoah*, and went on to capture 38 Union prizes before returning to Liverpool to surrender in November 1865, some six months after the surrender of the Confederacy.

Bulloch did more than any other individual to realize Mallory's vision of a fleet of high-seas commerce raiders. His success can be demonstrated through the post-war "*Alabama* claim," where the US Government claimed recompense from Britain for losses caused by the ships built to Bulloch's specifications. The claim was settled in 1872 for $15.5 million, representing the loss of over 150 prizes to British-built Confederate raiders.

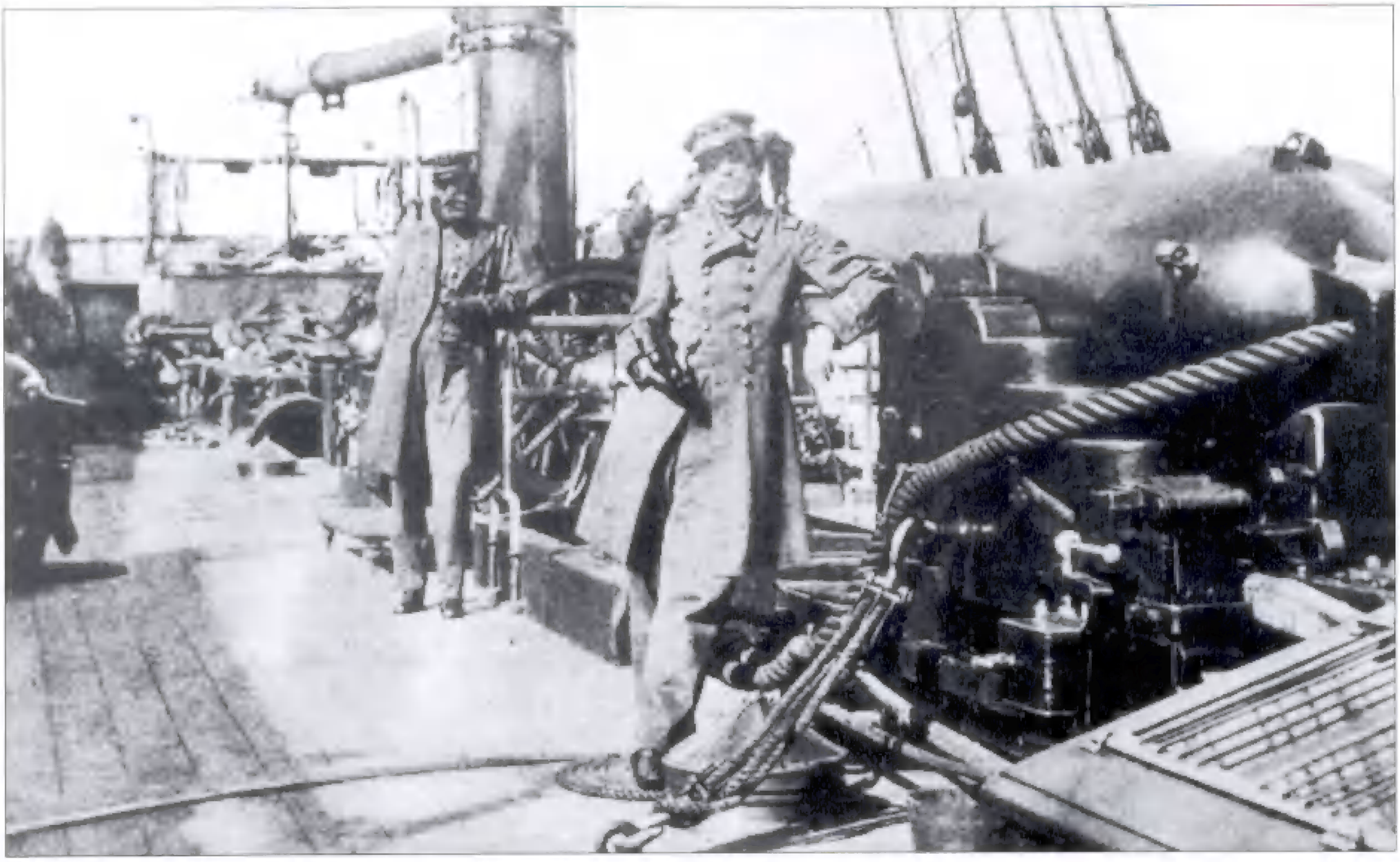


One of four potential commerce raiders built in France during 1863, the steamer *Shanghai* was earmarked to be renamed the *Georgia (II)*, but she was seized by the French authorities in February 1864, before she could be commissioned. She was sold to the Peruvian government, who renamed the warship *America*. She was beached and wrecked during a hurricane at Arica, Chile, in August 1868. (CHC)

THE BUSINESS OF COMMERCE RAIDING

The commerce raiding element of Stephen Mallory's naval strategy was a glowing success. His ten raiders took over 245 prizes, the majority of which were destroyed. The Union merchant marine was decimated, not exclusively by the attacks, but also by the "flight from the flag" and commercial paralysis that ensued. As a foretaste of similar campaigns involving submarines in the two World Wars of the 20th century, the action of the commerce raiders was a salutary lesson to the world's leading maritime powers. In strategic terms, these ten ships pinned down five times their number of Union cruisers, who could otherwise have increased the effectiveness of the Union blockade of the Southern coast.

Given the vastness of the ocean, it seems incredible that a raider could find its prey, or that its Union pursuers could ever catch it. There are a number of reasons why they were able to do this. Firstly, the majority of Union vessels captured by the raiders were sailing ships, and consequently the courses they set were dictated by wind patterns. Any experienced sailor knew that in the Atlantic, the cyclical pattern of the winds meant that there were two tracks along which sailing ships tended to travel: a curving northern route from New England to Europe, and a southern one from Europe to the Caribbean. By contrast, steam vessels, including the raiders, could travel where they liked, and were therefore capable of hiding in parts of the world's oceans that were rarely frequented by other ships. The raiders' vulnerability came through their occasional need to replenish stocks of coal, which meant that Union warships often patrolled off known coaling ports. Even then, the amateurish response to the raider threat by the Union Navy ensured that the press (and therefore the raiders) was often well informed of the location of Union cruisers. Similarly the patrolling of strategically important areas such as the western coast of Brazil or the Cape of Good Hope was not contemplated until the final year of the war. Clearly, the most dangerous time for a raider was when it was entering or leaving



a blockaded port. Commanders such as Semmes and Maffitt made optimal use of inclement weather, darkness and rough seas to hide their movements, while Maffitt in particular was a past master in the art of deception, routinely passing the *Florida* off as a merchantman or foreign warship.

Given that the majority of Union merchant ships were sailing vessels, even a steam-powered raider of limited speed could guarantee that, in most cases, it would overhaul its victim. This lack of reliance on wind made the Confederate raider a far more deadly threat than the sailing privateers employed during the War of 1812. A custom-built privateer was even more deadly. Raphael Semmes described his *Alabama* as "the first steamship in the history of the world—the defective little *Sumter* excepted—that was let loose against the commerce of a great people."

Once a prize was stopped, the Confederate captain had two options; destroy his victim by setting it on fire, or place it under "bond." As warships blockaded most friendly ports, the option of taking a captured prize back to a friendly port was not a viable one. American-owned cargoes and ships would usually be consigned to the torch. If the cargo was proven to belong to a foreign national, the vessel would be "bonded," a process which involved the signature of a "ransom bond" stating that the value of the vessel would be paid to the Confederate government within a set period of the end of the war. Raphael Semmes described the mixed emotions he felt when he burned his first ship flying the American flag in July 1861. After that it apparently became easier, as in his memoirs he described his depredations with relish. The crew of a prize that was due to be destroyed was placed in the lifeboats unless space was limited, in which case the raider herself would take

Captain Raphael Semmes, the commanding officer of the CSS *Alabama*, pictured standing next to the forward 7-in. (110-pdr.) rifled pivot gun. This photograph was one of a series taken on board the raider during her visit to Capetown, South Africa, in August 1863. The Executive Officer, Lieutenant John M. Kell, can be seen in the background. (CHC)

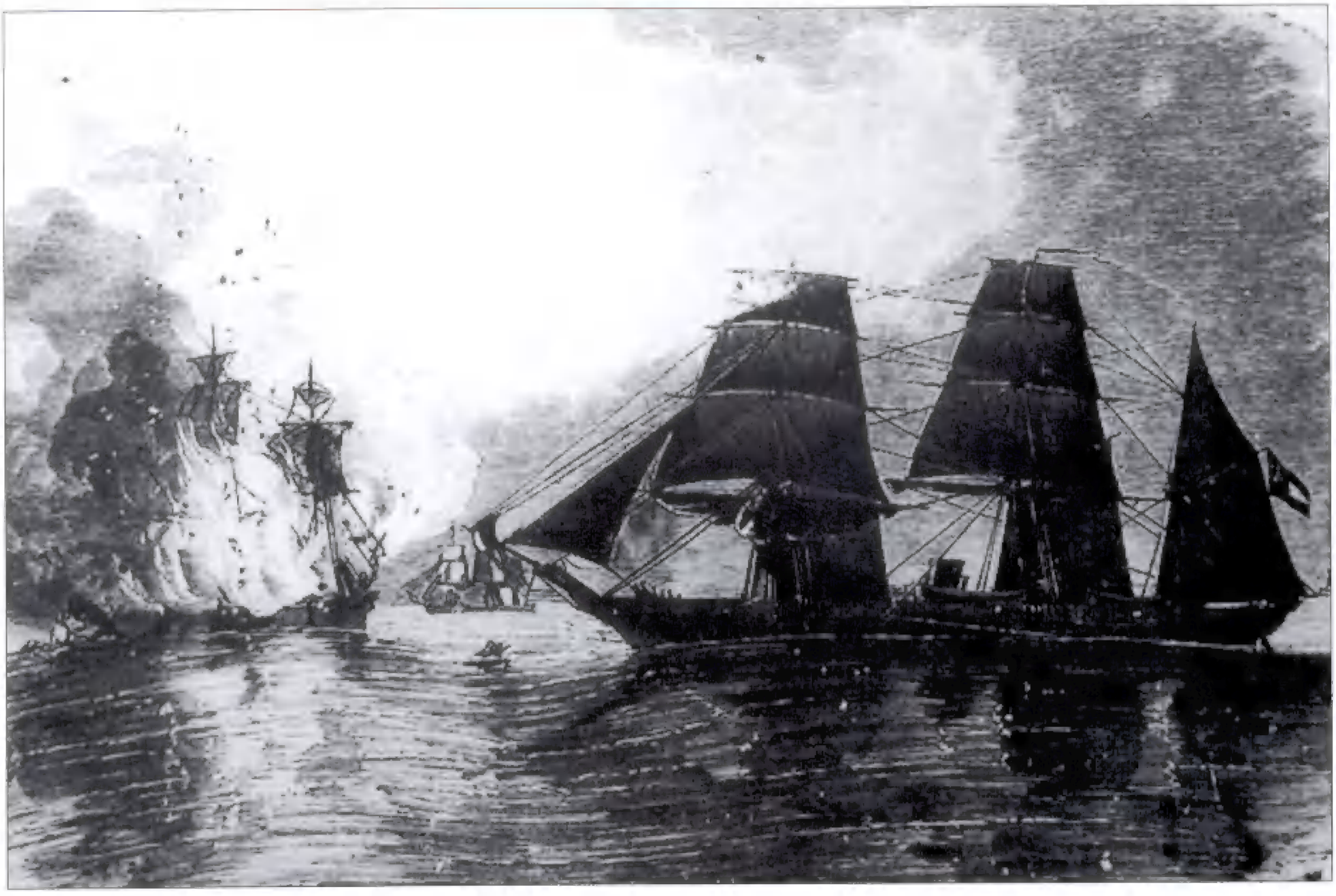
The CSS *Shenandoah* was the last of the Confederate raiders, and one of the most successful. The only Confederate warship to circumnavigate the globe, the raider was photographed in February 1865, when she docked in Melbourne, Australia. (CHC)

prisoners on board. If they included female passengers, the Confederate officers would usually offer the ladies their cabins until all the prisoners could be landed in a neutral port.

It was not the duty of a Confederate raider to engage the enemy, unless there was no choice. Commerce destruction was the object of the raider, and the risk of losing a set-piece engagement were too great to permit commanders the opportunity to indulge themselves in heroics. In the section describing gunnery, the way the raiders fought against enemy warships is examined in more detail. Above all else, the Confederate raider was a strategic weapon, the aim of which was to encourage the Union to open peace negotiations, or risk losing their merchant marine. The skills of the Confederate seagoing commanders were more than matched by the resolve of the Union government not to bow to pressure, and to stick rigidly to the strategic vision that would ultimately lead to a Union victory.

CREW

The problems facing the Confederate Navy when it came to crewing their warships have already been discussed in New Vanguard 41: *Confederate Ironclad 1861–65* (Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2001), but in general the Southern States lacked the pool of experienced seamen available to the Union, and recruitment policies favored service in the army rather than in the navy. The exception to this was officers, as the Confederacy had a surplus of experienced naval officers who "came south" when their home states seceded from the Union in 1861. With 343 officers to choose from, appointing the best men to command the

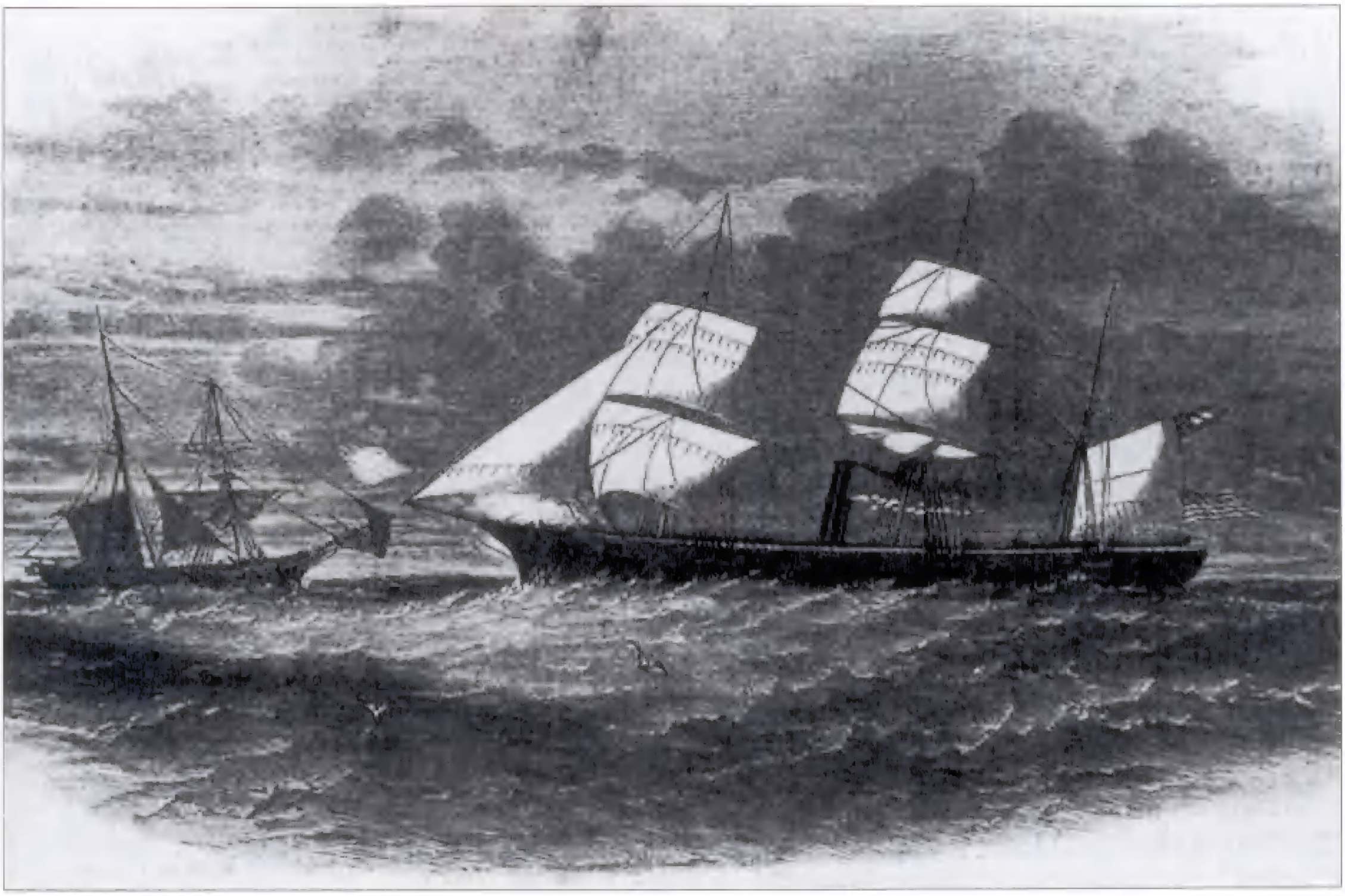


Captain Semmes of the CSS *Alabama* was a master tactician, and in this contemporary engraving he is shown burning a prize vessel in order to lure Union blockading warships towards her, and away from the ships they were escorting. The *Alabama* could then rely on her speed to outsail her rivals, and turn on the merchant vessels abandoned during the pursuit. (Author's Collection)

Confederate raiders was not particularly difficult, and Stephen Mallory had a knack for hiring the right men for the job. Of these, his appointment of James D. Bulloch and Matthew F. Maury to act as his European agents, and the selection of commanders such as Raphael Semmes, John Maffitt and James I. Waddell proved to be inspired selections.

In comparison with the problems inherent in finding seamen to crew warships kept in home waters, the business of crewing commerce raiders was relatively simple. The commanders of the Confederate cruisers had no difficulty in attracting skilled seamen for the prize money on offer, at least until the final year of the war. When the CSS *Sumter* sailed from New Orleans in the summer of 1861, the majority of her crew was highly-experienced merchant seamen. Of these, few were born in the Southern states. Raphael Semmes recalled, "I had not half a dozen southern-born men ... they were mostly foreigners." He even carried "two or three Yankees on board." A visitor to the CSS *Sumter* in Gibraltar described her crew as being "of all nations." When the CSS *Tallahassee* sailed from Wilmington in August 1864, her crew was "hand-picked," including Confederate Navy personnel recruited from the James River Squadron defending Richmond.

This emphasis on skill rather than nationality proved particularly effective when it came to finding crews for the raiders built or converted in European ports. When she was commissioned, the crew of the CSS *Alabama* was predominantly British. Semmes claimed that his "little floating kingdom consisted of 110 of the most reckless sailors from the groggeries and brothels of Liverpool." Others were former Confederate



The CSS *Sumter*, shown closing with the Union sailing brig *Joseph Parks*; 25th September, 1861. A warning shot was fired, forcing the Union merchantman to halt. (Author's collection)

sailors who had accompanied Semmes from Gibraltar after the loss of the CSS *Sumter*. As an incentive for recruitment, Semmes offered this crew a share of prize money (payable at the end of a cruise), wages equivalent to equal rank and pay structures in the Royal Navy, and an issue of grog twice a day, also in accordance with Royal Naval practice. Semmes told his recruiters he wanted men who were prepared to fight, and for the most part he got what he asked for, particularly the 60 former Royal Naval ratings that "had been picked up promiscuously about the streets of Liverpool." Additional seamen were recruited from prizes, or in ports the raiders visited during their cruises, as a means of replacing wastage through desertion, disease or injury. On the ill-starred CSS *Rappahannock*, most of its skeleton crew was British, but later Dutch and Belgian seamen signed onto the ship's books. On the *Shenandoah*, the crew included a significant percentage of Germans, plus seamen from most other European countries. Once more, there were even "Yankees" on the muster list. Further crewmen were recruited in Australia, when the *Shenandoah* visited Melbourne.

The Confederate raider's crew was therefore a cross section of the international maritime community, but was officered by veteran Confederate naval officers. Semmes defined the situation, when he wrote "With rare exception, the common sailor has no sense of nationality. He commences his sea-going career at so tender an age, and is so constantly at sea, and sails under so many flags, that he becomes eminently a citizen of the world." As long as the raider captains could pay their crew in hard currency, they were guaranteed the pick of the world's seamen for their crew.

OPERATIONAL HISTORY OF THE CONFEDERATE RAIDERS

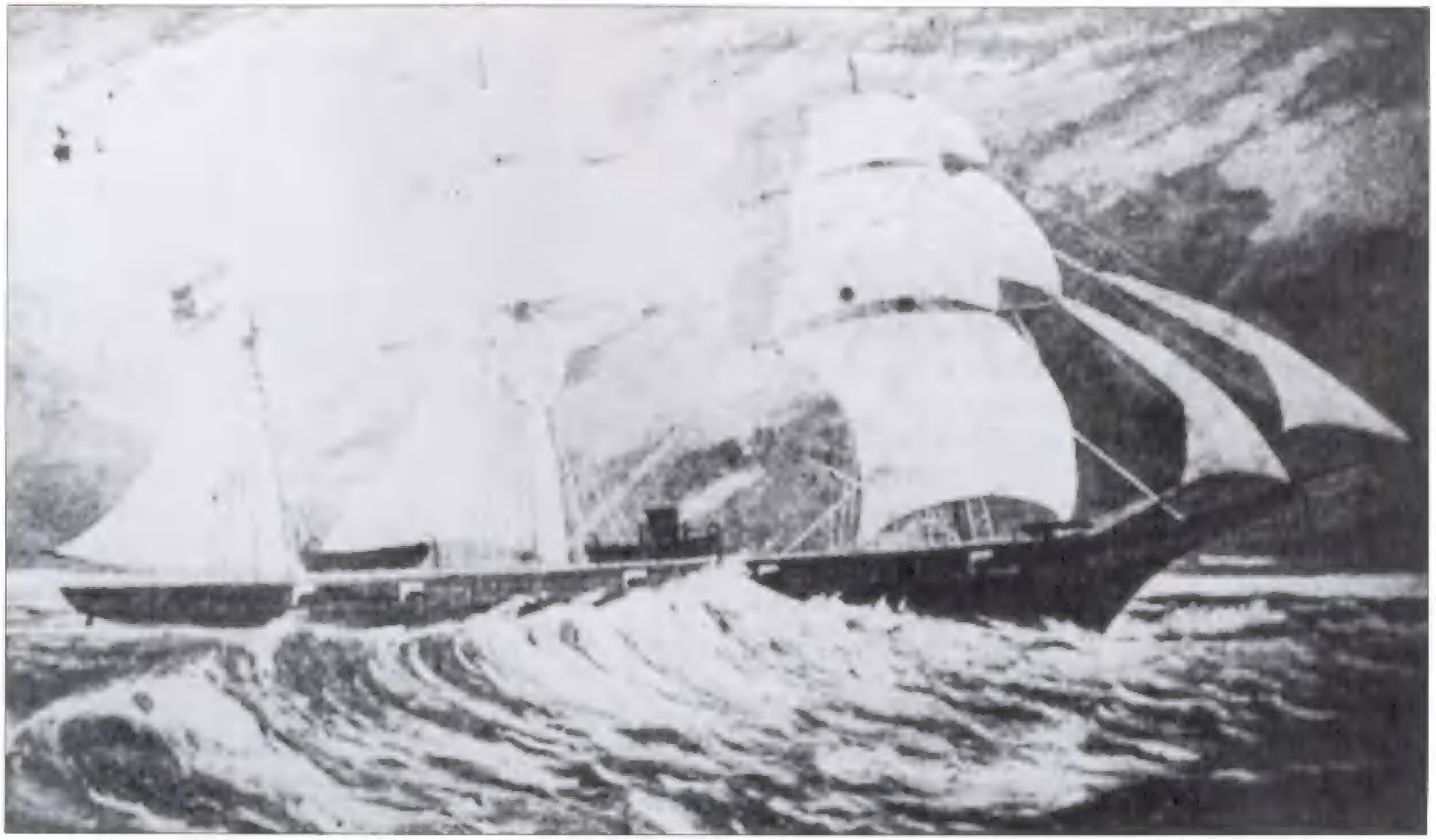
The scope of this book does not permit a detailed analysis of the careers of these vessels. Instead a brief operational history of each vessel is included below. In this, special emphasis has been placed on encounters between Confederate raiders and Union warships, and on the legal exchanges that were provoked by the arrival of these raiders in neutral ports. Apart from the actual business of taking prizes (which is dealt with elsewhere in this study), the naval and legal aspects of these vessels' careers are probably the most fascinating aspects of the story of the Confederate raiders. They represent new approaches to both diplomacy and naval warfare that presage the controversy surrounding U-boat warfare and maritime diplomatic immunity that played such an important part in the involvement of the United States of America in World War 1. The German U-boat commander who sank the RMS *Mauritania* in 1915 was simply carrying on an example first set by Confederate commanders such as Raphael Semmes and John Maffitt.

The principal raiders

CSS *Sumter*

The first of the Confederate raiders, the *Sumter* (Commander Raphael ("Ralph") Semmes) sailed from New Orleans on June 30, 1861, narrowly evading the USS *Brooklyn* off the Mississippi Delta. Semmes headed for the Brazilian coast, evading the USS *Iroquois* off Martinique. The *Sumter* then crossed the Atlantic, capturing over a dozen vessels before entering the Spanish port of Cadiz in January 1862. Semmes needed to repair his vessel, but the Spanish authorities gave in to Union pressure, and insisted the raider move to the British colony of Gibraltar. With her engines virtually useless and Union warships patrolling the Straits of Gibraltar, Semmes had little option but to disband his ship's company and lay up his raider in January 1862. Almost a year later, in December 1862, the *Sumter* was sold at public auction, where she was purchased by a British ship owner intent on turning her into a blockade runner. This first Confederate raiding venture was only a partial success, as the *Sumter* only captured or destroyed 18 vessels during her six month career. Despite this, Semmes set the tone for what was to come, and his actions caused shock waves among the Union ship-owners, whose insurance premiums soared. She also caused hundreds of ship-owners to "fly from the flag," abandoning the US merchant marine, and instead registering their vessel with a neutral government, such as Great Britain or Canada.

Two of the officers of the CSS *Alabama*, photographed during the raider's visit to Capetown, South Africa, in August 1863. Lieutenant Arthur Sinclair (left) and Lieutenant Richard F. Armstrong (right) are shown standing beside one of the 32-pdr. smoothbore guns, which were mounted as broadside weapons on the *Alabama*. (CHC)



The CSS *Alabama*, depicted during the hurricane she encountered off the coast of the Carolinas during the middle of October 1862. Semmes steamed through the eye of the hurricane on September 16, working on the principle that the conditions would deter the Union warships that were pursuing him. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, North Carolina)

CSS *Nashville*

The sidewheel steamer CSS *Nashville* (Lieutenant Robert B. Pegram) combined her role as a commerce raider with that of a diplomatic packet, carrying two Confederate proto-ambassadors to Europe, when she ran through the Union blockade off Charleston in late October 1861. Originally designed as a privateer, the *Nashville* was purchased by the Confederate government. Although she carried a tiny armament of two 12-pdr. smoothbores (some sources claim they were only 6-pdr. guns), she was deemed capable of overtaking then overpowering an unarmed Union merchantman. She captured a prize off the Carolina coast, and then sailed to Bermuda, where she took on coal for a transatlantic voyage. Despite being hunted by two Union warships, including the powerful screw sloop USS *Tuscarora*, she eluded her searchers, and even took another prize before arriving in the British port of Southampton. As the first Confederate warship to visit a European port, her arrival caused a diplomatic furor, and prompted Union shipping to avoid European waters or hide in European ports. She was due to leave Southampton when the USS *Tuscarora* arrived, and, after further wrangling, the *Nashville* slipped into the English Channel bound for Gibraltar. The *Tuscarora* was bound by maritime law to give the Confederate vessel a day's head start, so once again the Confederate raider eluded her pursuers. From the Gibraltar Straits she steamed west to Bermuda, then sailed on towards the Carolinas. After capturing her third prize on February 26, 1862, she slipped home into Beaufort, North Carolina. Although her cruise had been a success, the Confederate Navy deemed her a less than satisfactory high-seas raider. Consequently, she passed into private hands, and, after being renamed the *Rattlesnake*, she spent a brief few months as a privateer before being destroyed on the Ogeechee River by the Union monitor USS *Montauk* in February 1863. Like the *Sumter*, the effectiveness of the *Nashville* did not lie

in her results, but on the latent threat she posed to Union shipping. The next generation of foreign-built Confederate raiders would prove much more efficient.

CSS *Florida*

The British-built steamer *Oreto* left Liverpool on March 22, 1862, and sailed to the Bahamas. Here her new-found Confederate crew transformed her into the commerce raider CSS *Florida* (Commander John Maffitt). She was commissioned into the Confederate Navy on August 17, but an outbreak of yellow fever forced Maffitt to cancel her inaugural cruise. Instead, he headed for Mobile Bay, Alabama, a safe Confederate haven, albeit one which was blockaded by Union warships. Avoiding Union patrols in the Florida Straits; Maffitt approached Mobile Bay on September 4, despite having succumbed to the fever himself, and having insufficient crewmen to operate a single gun. Instead, Maffitt relied on deception. Flying the white ensign of the Royal Navy, the *Florida* looked like a British warship. This was hardly surprising, as her plans were copied from those of a Royal Naval gunboat. This allowed her to approach the three blockading warships, but once she was challenged, the rules of the game demanded that Maffitt hoist his true colors. Failure to do so would have meant he could have been branded a pirate if captured. The *Florida* endured the fire of the Union flotilla for some 20 minutes, but the Union warships were unable to prevent her reaching the protection of the guns of Fort Morgan, and safety.

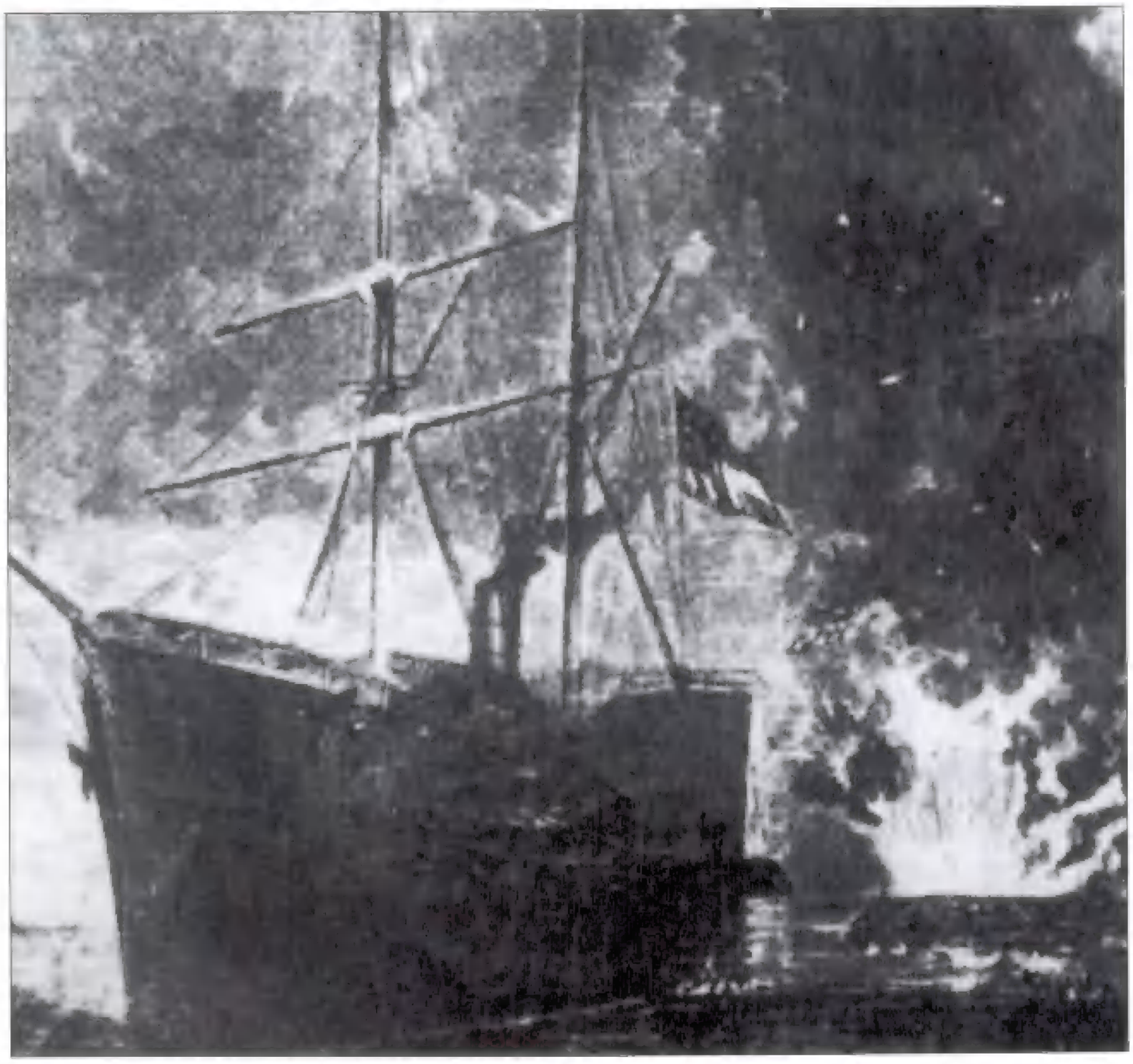
Commander John Newland Maffitt, commander of the raider CSS *Florida*. He proved to have a flair for commerce raiding, although he lacked the single-minded drive of Semmes when it came to destroying ships. Apparently, Maffitt preferred to release them "on bond" whenever practicable. (CHC)

The refitting of the *Florida* was delayed by local shortages of ordnance and supplies, but by January 1863, Maffitt was ready to renew his cruise. She slipped past the Union blockaders under cover of rainsqualls, and, although spotted, she evaded her pursuers. Her first cruise lasted some eight months, and in the process she captured 24 Union vessels, including the clipper *Jacob Bell*, with a cargo estimated at $1.5 million. Maffitt proved well versed in the arts of deception. He evaded the USS *Vanderbilt* off Cuba by pretending to be a merchantman, and the *Florida*'s engines were tested when she outran the USS *Sonoma* in the Bahamas. By August 1863, Maffitt decided he had to put into a neutral port for repairs, and so he sailed into the French port of Brest. Ill health forced Maffitt to hand over his ship to Lieutenant Charles M. Morris, who captured another 13 prizes over the next seven months, operating for the most part in the South Atlantic. Finally, on October 4, 1863, the *Florida*'s luck ran out. She put into the Brazilian port of Bahia to find the following morning that the enemy gunboat USS *Wachusett* was already in the harbor. Despite the rules governing the behavior of belligerents in a neutral port, Commander Napoleon Collins decided he had to take action. He raised steam and rammed the *Florida*, initiating a boarding

action. Half the Confederate crew was ashore, and the Union sailors captured the raider. This was accomplished despite the fire of Brazilian gunboats, which were trying to enforce the laws of neutrality. Nonplussed, the *Wachusett* towed the *Florida* out to sea, and continued on to join the Union fleet off Hampton Roads. Six weeks later the *Florida* was sunk during an accidental collision with a Union transport, ending the career of one of the most successful commerce raiders of the war. Both Maffitt and Morris displayed an innate ability in knowing where Union shipping was likely to be, and how best to capture the enemy vessels. However, even this spectacular career was to be overshadowed by the second of Bulloch's British raiders, the CSS *Alabama*.

CSS *Alabama*

The key to the success of the CSS *Alabama* was the appointment of Commander Raphael Semmes as her captain. Commissioned into the Confederate Navy off the Azores on August 24, 1862, the *Alabama* began her career ten days later when she captured the New England whaler *Ocmulgee*. Another nine whalers were destroyed in a period that decimated the New England whaling fleet off the Azores. Semmes then set a course northwest towards the Newfoundland Banks. Further depredations followed before the *Alabama* headed south towards the Caribbean, weathering a hurricane on route. The *Alabama* rendezvoused with her supply tender the *Agrippina* at Martinique, on November 17, only to find the USS *San Jacinto* had located her, and was waiting off the harbor mouth. Semmes slipped past the powerful Union warship in a tropical rainstorm three days later, and resumed his cruise. Semmes



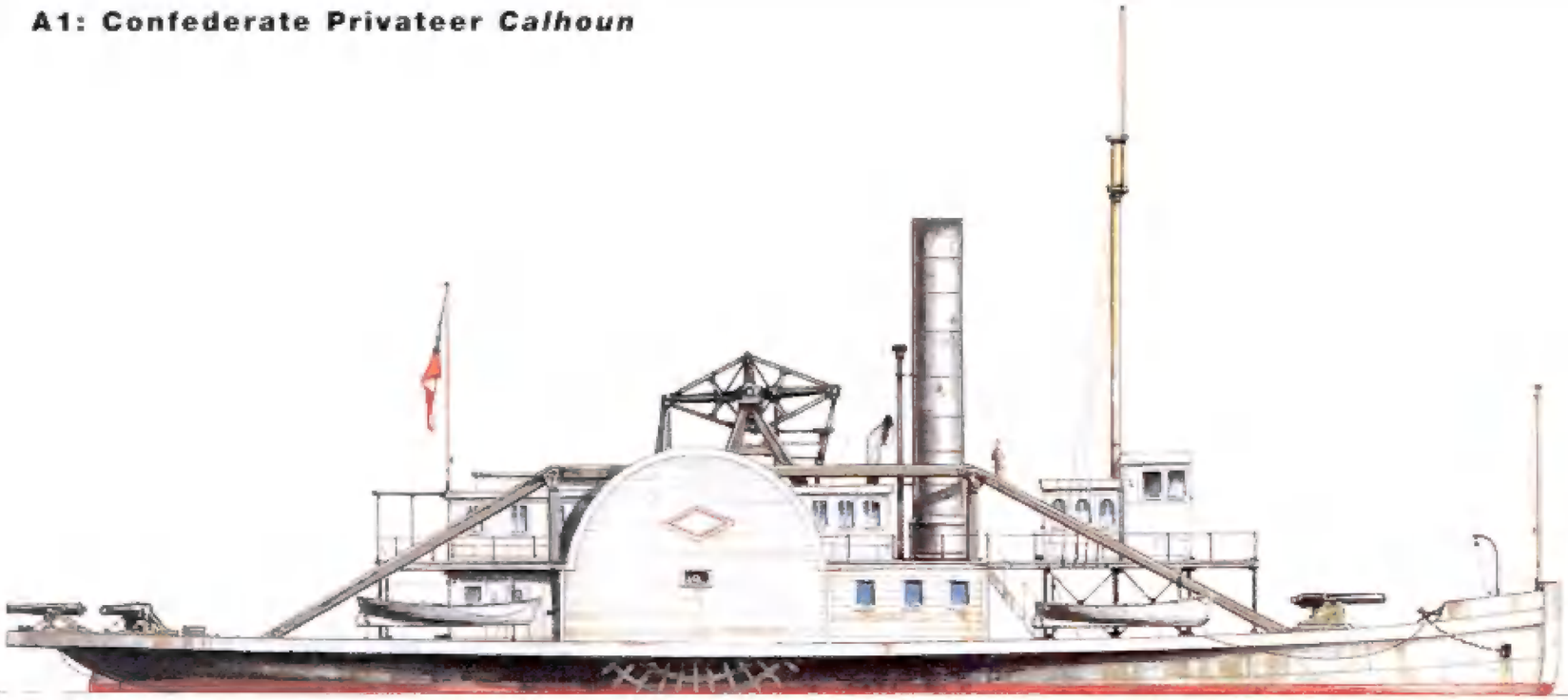
The raider CSS *Nashville* shown fleeing Beaufort, North Carolina, following the destruction of the Confederate Fort Macon at nearby Morehead City. Although the Fort is depicted on fire in the background, the *Nashville* actually escaped through the Beaufort blockade on March 17, 1862, a month before the fort was destroyed. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, North Carolina)

The CSS *Florida* at sea during a storm, in a highly inaccurate late-19th-century lithograph. Although it shows the *Florida* with two funnels, a ship-rig and no central pivot guns, the artist has conveyed the sometimes extreme conditions encountered by the raiders during their cruises. This lithograph is by an unknown French artist. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, North Carolina)

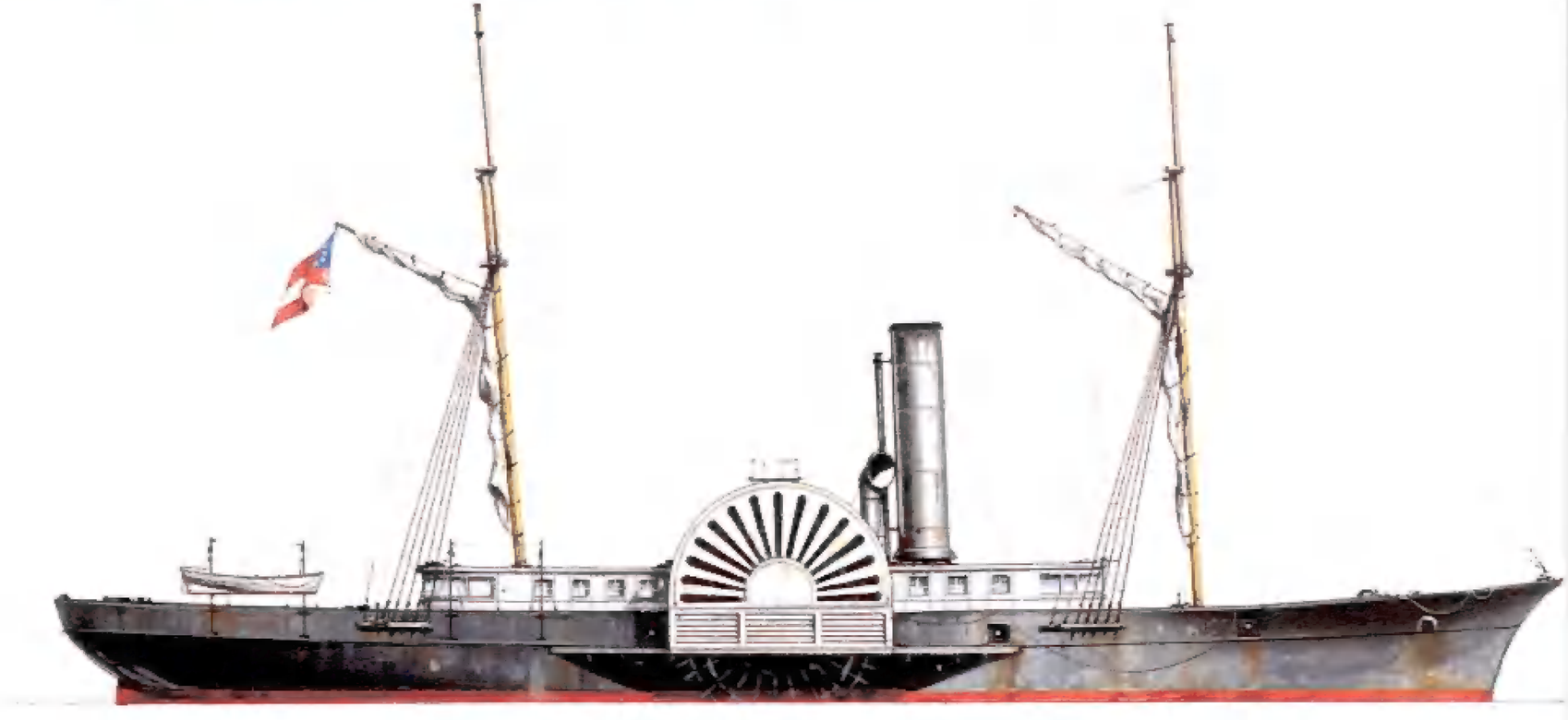
tried to intercept a steamer carrying gold from California off the Windward Passage between Jamaica and Hispaniola, but missed his prey. He destroyed two more prizes before capturing the *Ariel*, bound for California, with 500 passengers and a company of US Marines on board. Unable to cope with all those prisoners, Semmes was forced to "bond" the vessel. It was the raider's 28th and last prize of the year, and the only one that was not burned.

In December she passed though the busy Florida Straits into the Gulf of Mexico, and set course for Galveston, Texas. When he arrived off Galveston on January 11, 1863, Semmes found that a Union squadron was bombarding the port. The sidewheel gunboat USS *Hatteras* was detached from the force to intercept the new arrival. The *Alabama* turned away, drawing the *Hatteras* into giving chase. During the night, Semmes let the Union gunboat close to within 75 yards, then hauled down his British flag and fired. The *Hatteras* sank within 13 minutes, and the *Alabama* fled into the night. For the next three months she cruised through the Caribbean, then down the South American coast as far as Bahia, Brazil, capturing 20 more ships on the way. From Bahia, Semmes headed east, bound for Africa. On July 29, the *Alabama* arrived in South African waters, having destroyed five more prizes during her transatlantic voyage. A sixth, the *Conrad* (captured on June 20) was turned into an auxiliary raider, and was renamed the CSS *Tuscaloosa*. This vessel went on to capture four enemy merchantmen before being impounded by the British government. The *Alabama* spent the best part of three months in South Africa, leaving just in time to avoid an encounter with the sidewheel gunboat USS *Vanderbilt*, sent to the area to search for her. On September 24, the *Alabama* sailed into the Indian Ocean, but appalling weather prevented her from taking any prizes for six weeks, until she caught the Union clipper *Amanda* in the Sunda Straits on November 6, 1863. The USS *Wyoming* had guarded the area, but the Union warship had left to replenish her coal stocks two days before. Further operations in the Java Sea and South China Sea were

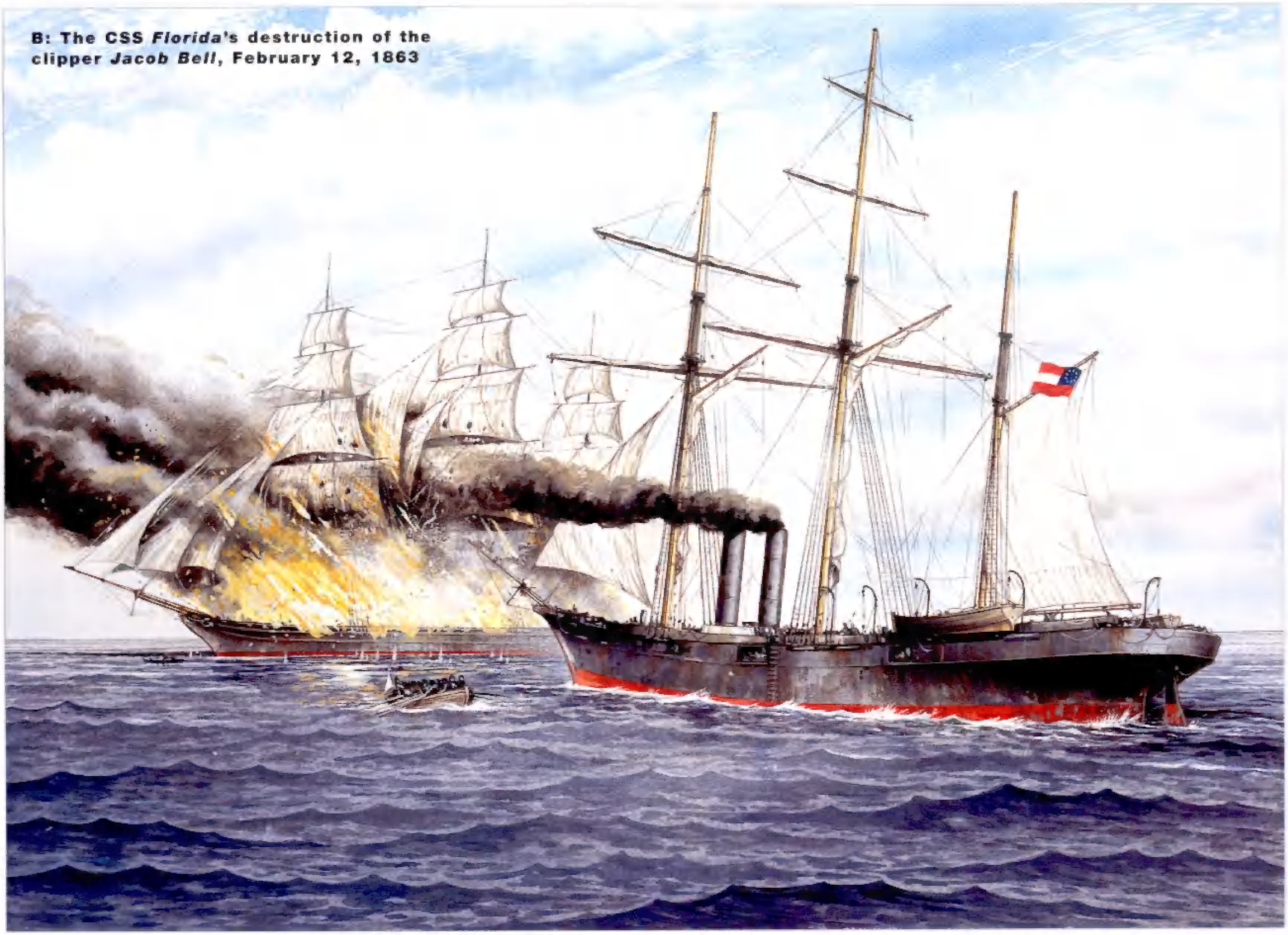
A1: Confederate Privateer *Calhoun*



A2: CSS *Nashville*

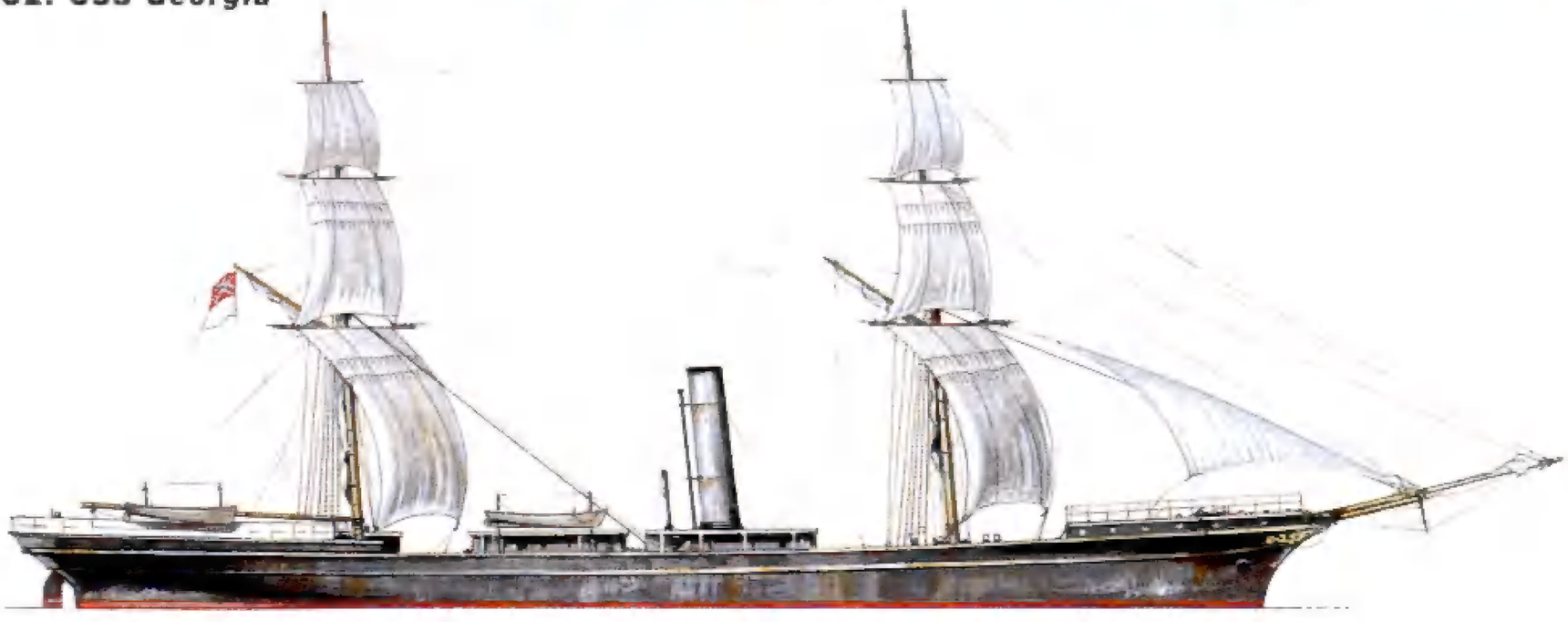


B: The CSS *Florida*'s destruction of the clipper *Jacob Bell*, February 12, 1863



C1: CSS *Florida*

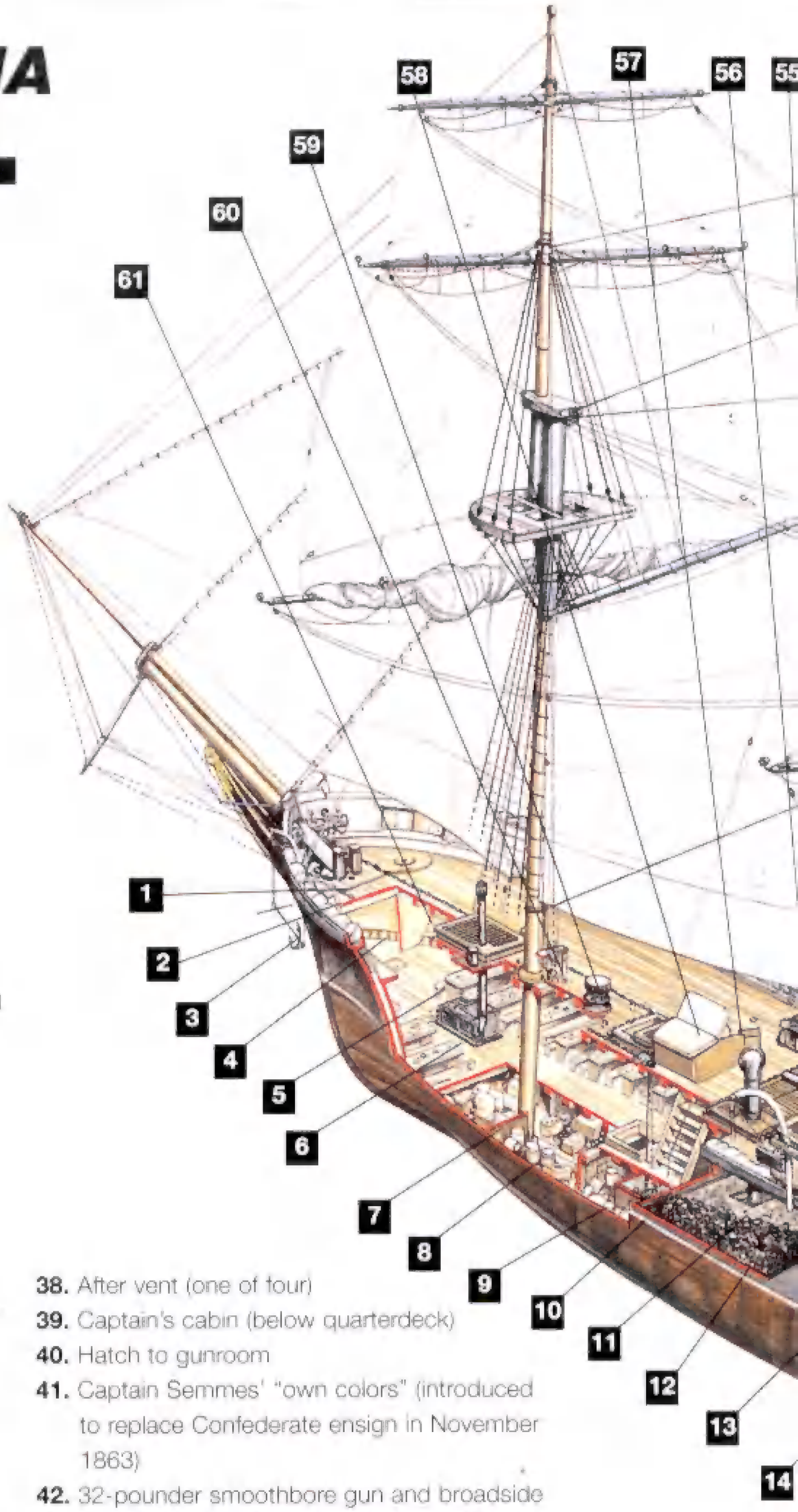
C2: CSS *Georgia*



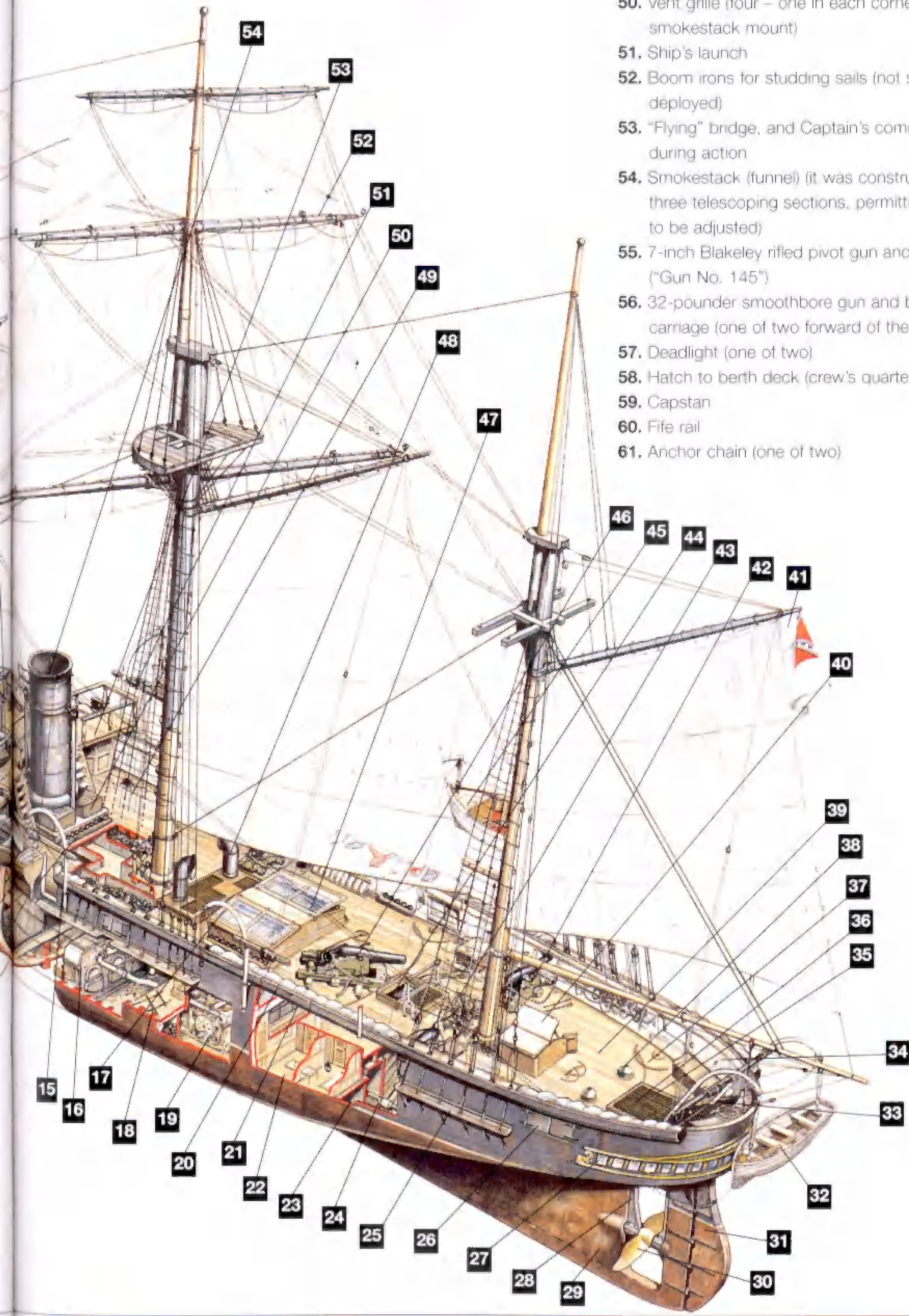
D: CSS *ALABAMA*

KEY

1. Towing post
2. Bow cable stopper
3. Anchor (on davits)
4. Sail room
5. Berth deck (crew's quarters on lower deck)
6. Ship's galley
7. Store rooms
8. Ship's magazine, and water tanks
9. Store rooms
10. Chain locke
11. Stoke hole
12. Coal bunkers
13. Ship's cutter
14. Ready-use shot racks
15. Entry port (one on each beam)
16. Boiler (one of four)
17. Lifeboat davits
18. Diagonal iron braces (riders), and truss pieces
19. Engine
20. Hammock netting
(used as protection against small-arms fire)
21. Gunport cover – removable section of bulwark, swung down when the aft pivot gun was readied for action
22. Officer's staterooms (cabins)
23. Propeller tunnel
24. Propeller shaft
25. Mizzen mast channel
26. Broadside gun port (note: the rearmost ports were unused until the *Alabama* added two captured guns to her broadside armament in December 1862. As there is no conclusive proof these guns stayed in their aft ports throughout the next 2 years, their presence has been omitted)
27. Dummy windows
28. Propeller lifting mechanism ("banjo")
29. Copper sheathing to lower hull
30. Propeller
31. Rudder
32. Ship's dinghy
(most common transport for boarding party)
33. Flag locker
34. Arms chest (one of two)
35. Rudder head, and propeller lifting gear
36. Horse-block covering
37. Deck sweeps for pivot guns

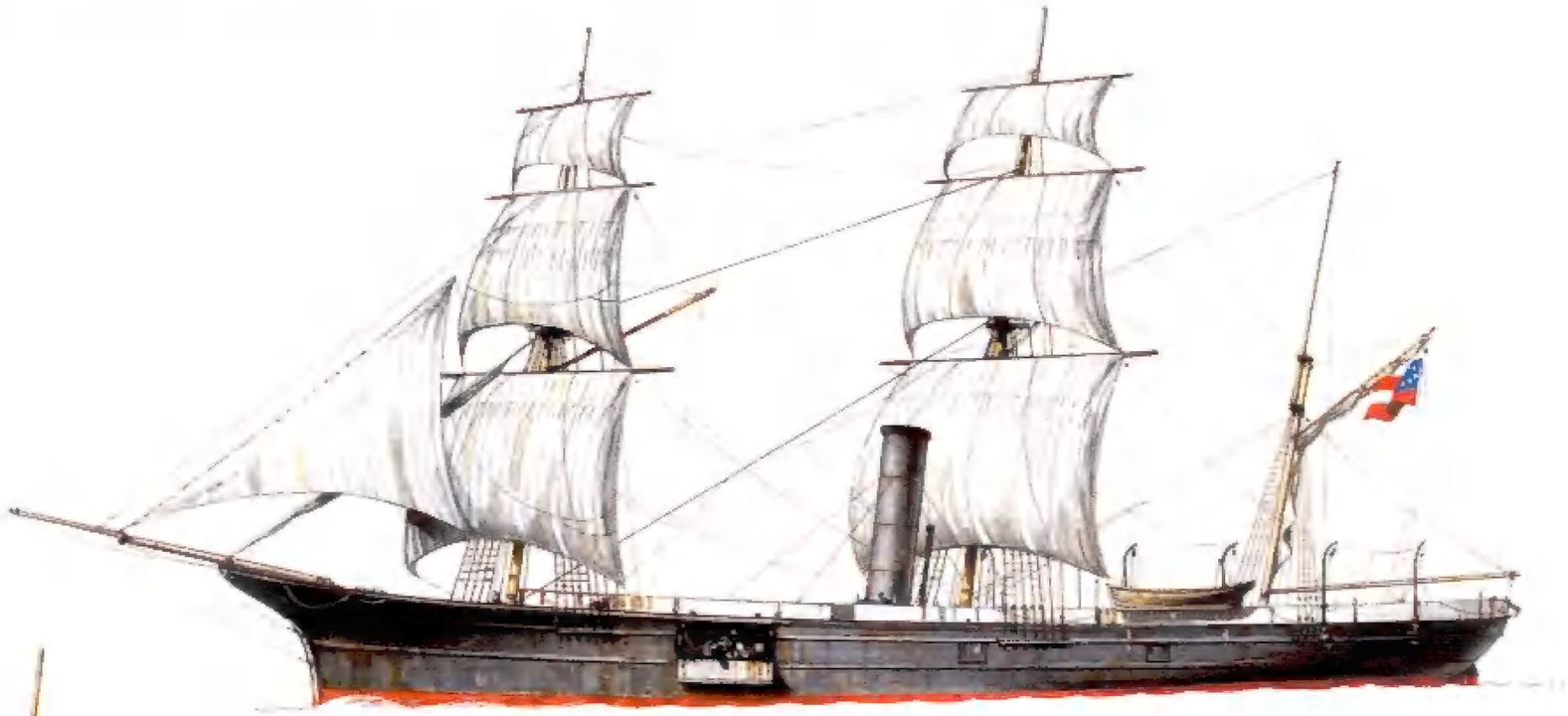


38. After vent (one of four)
39. Captain's cabin (below quarterdeck)
40. Hatch to gunroom
41. Captain Semmes' "own colors" (introduced to replace Confederate ensign in November 1863)
42. 32-pounder smoothbore gun and broadside carriage (one of four aft of the smokestack)
43. Double wheel
44. Hatch to engineering space, steward's pantry and dispensary (sick bay)
45. Captain's gig
46. 8-inch Fawcett-Preston smoothbore gun on pivot carriage ("Gun No. 144")
47. Engine room skylight (with barred glass)
48. Midships ventilator (one of four)
49. Coal scuttle (one of ten loading hatches)



50. Vent grille (four – one in each corner of smokestack mount)
51. Ship's launch
52. Boom irons for studding sails (not shown deployed)
53. "Flying" bridge, and Captain's command post during action
54. Smokestack (funnel) (it was constructed from three telescoping sections, permitting its height to be adjusted)
55. 7-inch Blakeley rifled pivot gun and carriage ("Gun No. 145")
56. 32-pounder smoothbore gun and broadside carriage (one of two forward of the smokestack)
57. Deadlight (one of two)
58. Hatch to berth deck (crew's quarters)
59. Capstan
60. Fife rail
61. Anchor chain (one of two)

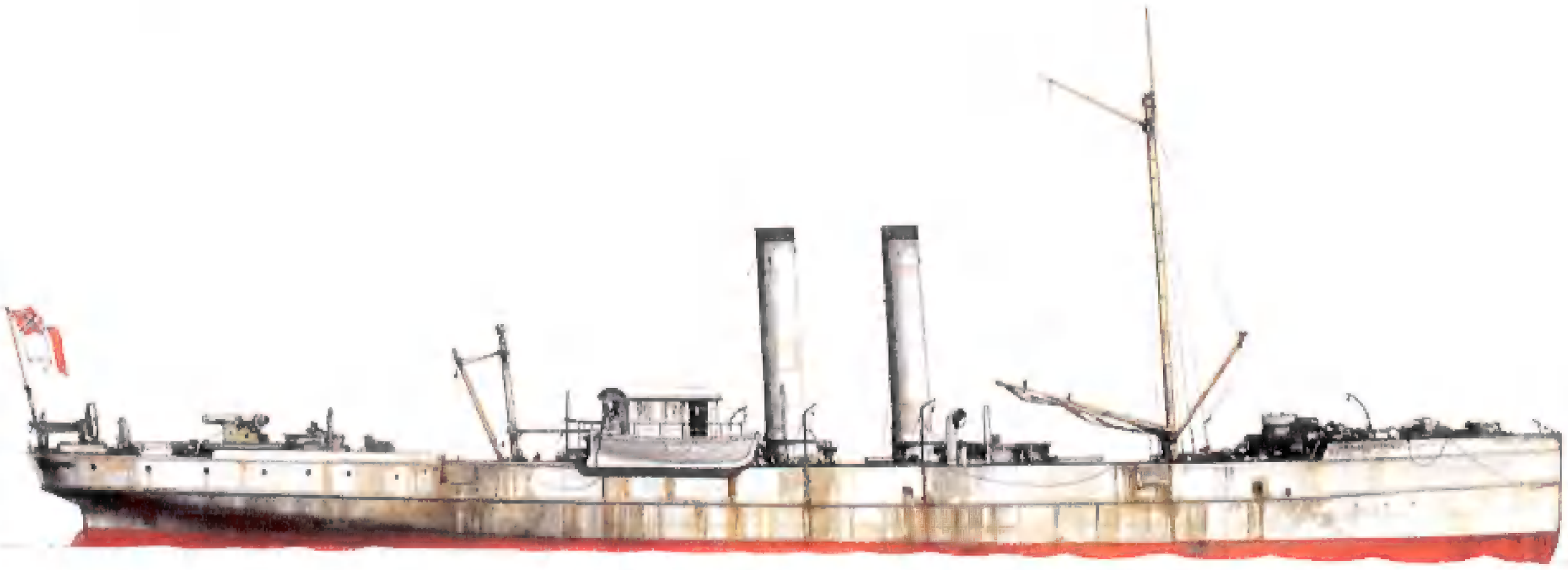
E1: CSS *Sumter*



E2: CSS *Rappahannock*

F: The fight off Cherbourg, between the CSS *Alabama* and the USS *Kearsage*, June 19, 1864

G1: CSS *Tallahassee* (later known as the CSS *Olustee*)



G2: CSS *Shenandoah*

Lieutenant Charles M. Morris, the second and last commander of the CSS *Florida*. A skilful practitioner of commerce raiding, he let his guard down when he entered the Brazilian port of Bahia, and consequently the USS *Wachusett* took his ship during a surprise attack. (Author's Collection)

overshadowed by the need to avoid the *Wyoming*, but a handful of Union ships were caught and burned. Having realized his presence was scaring Union merchant shipping away, Semmes re-crossed the Indian Ocean, reaching Cape Town on March 21, 1864. The British authorities there were decidedly less cordial than on his previous visit, indicating a policy shift by the British government. Fearing some legal action to impound his ship, he sailed for Brazil, capturing two more prizes on the way. The *Tycoon*, destroyed on April 27, would be the last prize taken by the *Alabama*. Semmes needed to repair his ship, and he steamed towards France, reaching Cherbourg on June 11. Three days later the USS *Kearsage* arrived in Cherbourg, and three days after that, the *Alabama* sailed out to do battle with the Union warship. Despite a gallant fight, the *Alabama* was no match for her adversary, and, after almost 90 minutes of fighting, she sank. The most successful Confederate raider of the war, the CSS *Alabama* was the archetypal commerce raider, and her captain displayed brilliance for privateering that was second to none. With her passing, Mallory's commerce raiding initiative had reached its final stages. As the Confederacy faced defeat, a last few raiders put to sea determined to make the Union pay a high price for her success.

CSS *Georgia*

In March 1863, Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury purchased a new iron-hulled steamer called the SS *Japan* in the Scottish port of Dumbarton on behalf of a fictitious client. When she set sail from Scotland bound for Singapore, she carried a skeleton crew of 50 men. Off Ushant she rendezvoused with the chartered merchantman *Alar*, took aboard its cargo of guns and ammunition, and transformed herself into a commerce raider. On April 9, she was commissioned into the Confederate Navy as the CSS *Georgia*. The *Georgia* (Commander William Maury – the cousin of the purchaser) was armed with two powerful 8-in. rifles, as well as three smaller pieces, making her a well-armed warship. Maury took her across the Atlantic to Brazil, and then he cruised the waters of the South Atlantic as far as the South African coast, taking nine prizes, of which four were "bonded." It was discovered that her hull was in poor condition, and, leaking badly, she limped into the French port of Cherbourg on October 29, 1863, to effect repairs. After several months of work, Maury and his surveyors decided that there was little they could do, as the vessel was considered too unsound to risk on further long voyages. In February 1864, it was decided to transfer her stores and armament onto a new commerce raider, the ex-British gunboat *Victor* (*Rappahannock*), and a rendezvous was established off Morocco. The *Victor* never appeared, so, after a brief skirmish with local Arabs, the crew of the *Georgia* set sail back to Europe, avoiding Union patrols to enter Liverpool in May 1864. The *Georgia* was decommissioned

The CSS *Florida* shown at anchor in Bahia harbor on the evening of October 4, 1864. A Brazilian gunboat is shown behind her, and in the distance is the USS *Wachusett*, a vessel the commander of the *Florida* took to be British. (Author's Collection)

and sold the following month as a blockade runner. A Union warship captured her off Portugal three months later. A singularly unsuccessful raider, the *Georgia* showed how desperate Confederate agents were to find suitable vessels by the middle of 1863.

CSS *Rappahannock*

Originally built in London as a corvette (gunboat) for the Royal Navy in 1857, HMS *Victor* had proven herself to be a less than efficient warship, and she was used as a dispatch vessel. A temporary cut-back in Britain's overseas naval commitment, combined with her poor maintenance record, led to her being decommissioned by the Royal Navy, and offered for sale. In November 1863, Matthew Fontaine Maury purchased her, and moved her to Sheerness Dockyard, where the gunboat underwent urgent repairs. Although Maury had developed a front company, and claimed the *Victor* would be used as a trading vessel in Chinese waters, Union informants had followed Maury, and were well aware of his true intentions. On November 24, 1863, the British government ordered that the ship was to be detained, but Confederate sympathizers in the dockyard warned Maury, who immediately put to sea with a skeleton crew. The departure was so rapid that Maury even had to land a number of dockyard workers who were still working on board when the ship sailed. On her way down the Thames Estuary an engine bearing burned out, followed by a second mechanical failure in mid-Channel. Using his initiative, Maury hurriedly commissioned the ship the CSS *Rappahannock*, and requested permission to enter the French port of Calais to effect emergency repairs. Surprisingly for this stage of the war, the request was granted, but later French injunctions prevented both her full repair, and the embarkation of a full crew. Maury returned to Britain, and Lieutenant C. M. Fauntleroy was sent from the Confederate legation in Paris to assume command. He started to prepare the *Rappahannock* for sea, but the French authorities realized his intentions, and sent a gunboat to block her exit from the harbor. She spent the remaining years of the war as a storeship, and her sole contribution to the war effort was to keep two Union warships occupied off Calais during early 1864.

CSS *Tallahassee*

The fast steamer *Atalanta* was built in Millwall, London, in 1863, ostensibly for use as a cross-channel steamer. Her real purpose (probably

from the outset) was to be used as a blockade runner. Her name was duly altered to *Atlanta* as soon as she was completed. During the latter half of 1863, she sailed from London to Wilmington, North Carolina, where her sleek lines drew the attention of the Confederate Navy. They purchased her for use as a commerce raider, and on July 20,1864, she was commissioned into service at Wilmington as the CSS *Tallahassee* (Commander John T. Wood). Just over two weeks later, on August 5, she broke through the cordon of Union warships blockading Wilmington, and, despite minor damage, she succeeded in evading her pursuers. Wood steamed up to New York, and, taking position off Fire Island, he seized a pilot boat, using her to capture 20 unsuspecting merchantmen. A rash scheme to bombard Brooklyn Naval Base was abandoned, and, short of coal, the *Tallahassee* steamed north to operate off New England, capturing another 26 ships over a ten-day period before a shortage of coal forced Wood to head back to Wilmington. On August 26, 1864, the *Tallahassee* ran the Union blockade off Wilmington once more, but reached port without mishap. A theory that she intended to participate in a scheme to launch a guerrilla war in Maine supported from Canada has been suggested, but even if a possibility, the scheme came to nothing.

For state political reasons the vessel was renamed the CSS *Olustee* during her time in Wilmington, and a new officer replaced Wood as her commander. On October 29, 1864, she broke through the blockaders, again without receiving serious damage, and she spent the next week cruising off Delaware, destroying six prizes between November 1–3. On November 5 she was surprised and engaged off Chesapeake Bay by the sidewheel gunboat *Sassacus*; after a running battle that lasted a whole day, she managed to escape, outpacing four more pursuers to enter Wilmington late the following day. Her days as a raider were over, as the army insisted that she be used as a fast transport, to run the blockade and ferry much-needed supplies to the Confederate army. Renamed

"Cutting-out of the *Florida* from Bahia, Brazil, by the USS *Wachusset*(t)." The brief pre-dawn action was fought while the CSS *Florida* was still at anchor in the neutral harbor on October 7, 1864. (Author's Collection)

the *Chameleon*, she ran the blockade on December 24, and after being impounded in Bermuda, she was released. Unable to return to Wilmington due to the capture of Fort Fisher, her commander (Captain John Wilkinson) steamed across the Atlantic to Liverpool, where she was handed over to James Bulloch on April 9, 1865, the day Lee surrendered at Appomattox. The *Chameleon* was duly impounded by the British authorities, and was later sold to the Japanese Navy. Although the *Tallahassee* was a successful raider, her high coal consumption and restricted bunker space limited her cruising range. Despite these drawbacks, Wood managed to place her in exactly the right locations to cause the greatest possible damage to the Union merchant marine.

The action between the CSS *Alabama* (left) and the USS *Hatteras* (right) fought off Galveston, Texas, on January 11, 1863. The Union vessel proved no match for the powerful pivot guns of the *Alabama*, and she was destroyed within 13 minutes. Contemporary lithograph by A. Hoen & Co. of Baltimore, Maryland. (CHC)

CSS *Chickamauga*

In August 1864, the London-built blockade runner *Edith* was purchased by the Confederate Navy in Wilmington, North Carolina, for use as a commerce raider. Built in the same yard as the *Tallahassee*, she was considered a well-built and fast vessel. However, like the other Wilmington-based raider, her small coalbunkers and high fuel consumption limited her range. Commissioned the *Chickamauga* (Lieutenant John Wilkinson) in September 1864, she was prepared for sea with coal stacked in every conceivable space on board. On October 29, she passed through the Union blockade, and after evading her pursuers, she headed north towards Long Island. After capturing seven prizes, she fled to Bermuda, arriving on November 7, 1864. The island was gripped by yellow fever, so after eight days spent replenishing her coal supplies, Wilkinson conned the *Chickamauga* back out to sea. On November 18, she arrived off the Cape Fear River, and heavy fog enabled her to slip under the guns of Fort Fisher to reach the safety of Wilmington with only minor damage from the fire of two Union gunboats. By this stage the Union Navy was gathering off the Cape Fear River for an all-out attack on Fort Fisher. The *Chickamauga* spent the next eight weeks supporting the fort, ferrying supplies, men and ammunition from Wilmington down river to help the garrison. When Fort Fisher fell on January 15, 1865, the *Chickamauga* escaped upriver to Fayetteville where she was burned to prevent her capture by Union troops. This was a miserable end to a sleek, graceful ship.

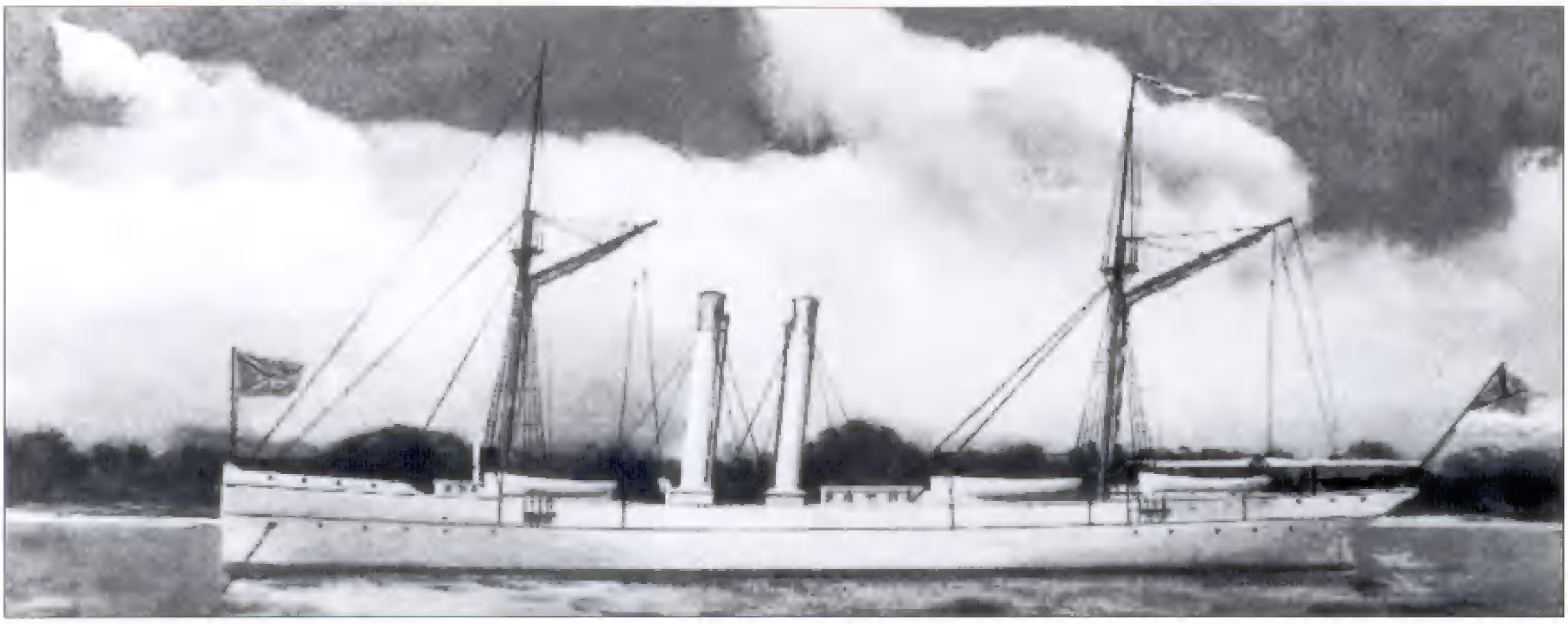
CSS *Shenandoah*

Famed for being the last active Confederate raider, the *Shenandoah* was a compromise design. Unable to design and commission commerce raiders from scratch due to Britain's strictly-enforced neutrality laws, James D. Bulloch was forced to search the British Isles for vessels that

Matthew Fontaine Maury was a well-respected marine scientist before the war. In late 1862 he was sent to Britain to assist James D. Bulloch in the purchasing of warships to convert into Confederate Raiders. (CHC)

had the potential for conversion. The newly built *Sea King* had just completed her maiden voyage, transporting troops to India. Bulloch purchased the ship in London during September 1864, and by October 8, he was ready to sail. His smoke-screen of subterfuge and legal camouflage prevented the British authorities from taking action against him, and the unarmed ship entered the international waters of the English Channel without any significant delays. At Madeira, the *Sea King* rendezvoused with the merchant vessel *Laurel*; this ship contained a cargo of guns, supplies, ammunition, and a crew. On October 19, 1864, she was commissioned into the Confederate Navy, and renamed the CSS *Shenandoah* (Lieutenant James I. Waddell). Eleven days later the raider took its first prize, and then sailed south into the South Atlantic, destroying five more ships before rounding the Cape of Good Hope in late December. On January 25 1865, the *Shenandoah* steamed into Melbourne, Australia, where delays in the payment for repairs kept her in port for almost two months. His ship's company augmented by Australians, Waddell passed into the Pacific Ocean, and, despite encountering typhoons, he caught up with part of the New England whaling fleet near Ponape, destroying five whalers. He then sailed north into the Barents Sea, and, during June 1865, the *Shenandoah* captured 21 whalers, destroying all but four of them. Although whaler captains tried to convince him the war was over, Waddell refused to believe them. He headed south, destroying another 16 prizes, bringing his total to 47. Finally, on August 2, 1865, the captain of the British barque *Barracouta* showed Waddell the latest newspapers. This convinced him that the war was lost. At this stage he was off the Californian coast, and was contemplating a raid on San Francisco. Waddell might have added a

The unsuccessful Confederate raider CSS *Rappahannock* began life as the gunboat HMS *Victor*, but the Royal Navy decommissioned her due to problems with her hull and engines. This failed to deter the ship-hungry Confederate agents in Britain, who purchased her, then spirited the vessel over to the French port of Calais. This picture was taken in Calais shortly after the French authorities seized the raider in February 1864. (CHC)



The CSS *Chickamauga*, from a color wash drawing by marine artist Clary Ray, painted in 1897. A former blockade runner, the *Chickamauga* proved unsuitable as a commerce raider, and finished her active career supporting the Confederate defense of Fort Fisher, North Carolina, in January 1865. (CHC)

bizarre postscript to the naval history of the Civil War if he had not encountered the *Barracouta*.

Avoiding all other ships, he rounded Cape Horn, and headed north towards Liverpool. He surrendered his ship to the British authorities there on November 6, 1864. Dubbed "Rip Van Winkle" by an amused press for continuing to fight the war for eight months after the Confederate surrender, he was also admired for his achievement. During her career, the *Shenandoah* steamed almost 60,000 miles, and remained the only Confederate raider to circumnavigate the earth. After her surrender, she was sold to the Sultan of Zanzibar, who used the *Shenandoah* as his private yacht until she was wrecked in 1879.

Auxiliaries and other potential commerce raiders

In addition to the larger and more celebrated Confederate high-seas raiders of the war, a handful of prizes were turned into commerce raiders by their captors. Several other commerce raiders were also ordered, but never entered service in the Confederate Navy. The CSS *Alabama* converted the prize *Conrad* into a sailing commerce raider. Renamed the *Tuscaloosa* in June 1863, she cruised in the South Atlantic, capturing two prizes during the summer before putting in to Cape Town, in South Africa. There the British authorities seized the vessel on December 26.

On May 6, 1863, the CSS *Florida* captured the Baltimore clipper *Coquette*. After renaming her the *Clarence* (Lieutenant C.W. Read), the Confederates used her as a raider. For the next five weeks the *Clarence* cruised off the coast of New England, capturing 14 prizes, the majority of which were fishing boats. The last vessel captured by the *Clarence*, on June 12, 1863, was the Delaware-built sailing barque *Tacony*. As over 40 ships were searching for the *Clarence*, Reade burned her and transferred to the *Tacony*. He took 15 vessels over the next two weeks, before changing ships again, destroying the *Tacony* on June 25, and transferring his crew to the fishing vessel *Archer*. Two days later Read raided the harbor of Portland, Maine, destroying a Union revenue cutter. The following day the *Archer* was overhauled and captured after, a short fight with two converted merchant steamers.

A handful of other commerce raiders were built during the war. The small bark-rigged steamer *Alexandra* was purchased by James D. Bulloch

Lieutenant James I. Waddell (1824–86), the last of the Confederate raiders. He surrendered his ship CSS *Shenandoah* to the British authorities in Liverpool, some eight months after the war had ended. (CHC)

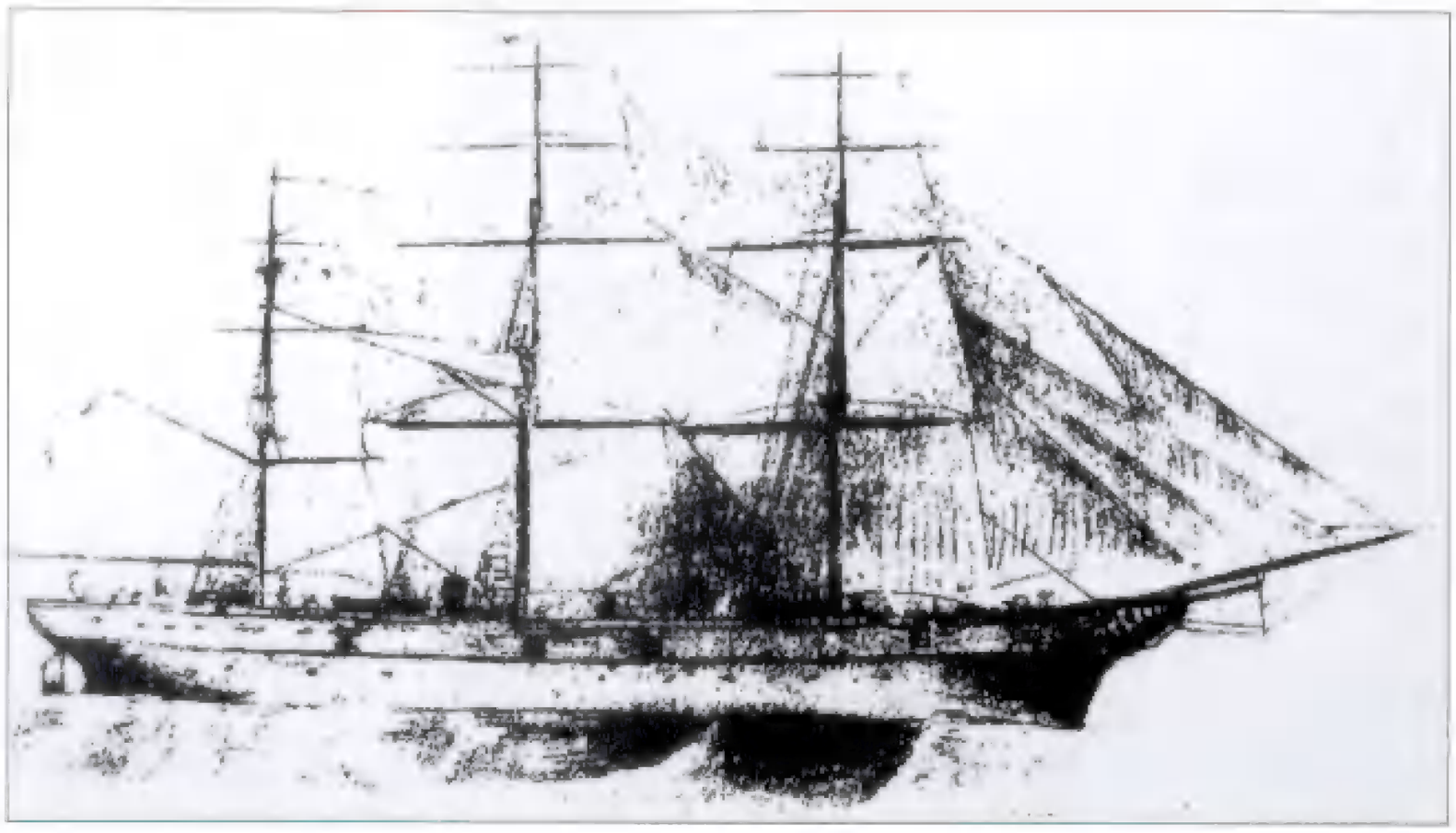
from her Liverpool builders, but the British impounded the vessel before she could sail. She was released by order of the courts in May 1864, and Bulloch sent her to the Bahamas, where it was hoped she could be transformed into a raider. The authorities there impounded her for the remainder of the war. Bulloch also purchased the brand new Scottish iron-hulled steamer *Georgiana* (519 tons) in December 1862, and successfully spirited her out of British clutches. On March 19, 1863, she was destroyed by gunfire from the USS *Wissahickon* as she tried to run through the blockade of Charleston Harbor. Bulloch also purchased the 2,000-ton Clydebank (Glasgow) steamer *Pampero* in November 1863. Destined to be the commerce raider *Texas*, she was given the cover-name *Canton*, but was seized by the British authorities in December 1863. Bulloch also ordered the building of four vessels in the French ports of Nantes and Bordeaux. Work was begun in April 1863, but the French authorities seized them in February 1864, before they were launched. Bulloch planned to rename them the *Georgia (II)*, *Louisiana*, *Mississippi* and *Texas*. Similarly, Maury ordered the building of two 970-ton iron-hulled steamers in the Scottish yard Denny's in Dumbarton. They were given the cover names of *Adventure* and *Enterprise*, Maury and Bulloch planned to sail them to Wilmington (the only Confederate port open to them), and commission them as the commerce raiders *Olustee* and *Vicksburg*. Although the *Adventure* managed to sail from Scotland in January 1865, the war ended before either vessel could enter service.

Privateers

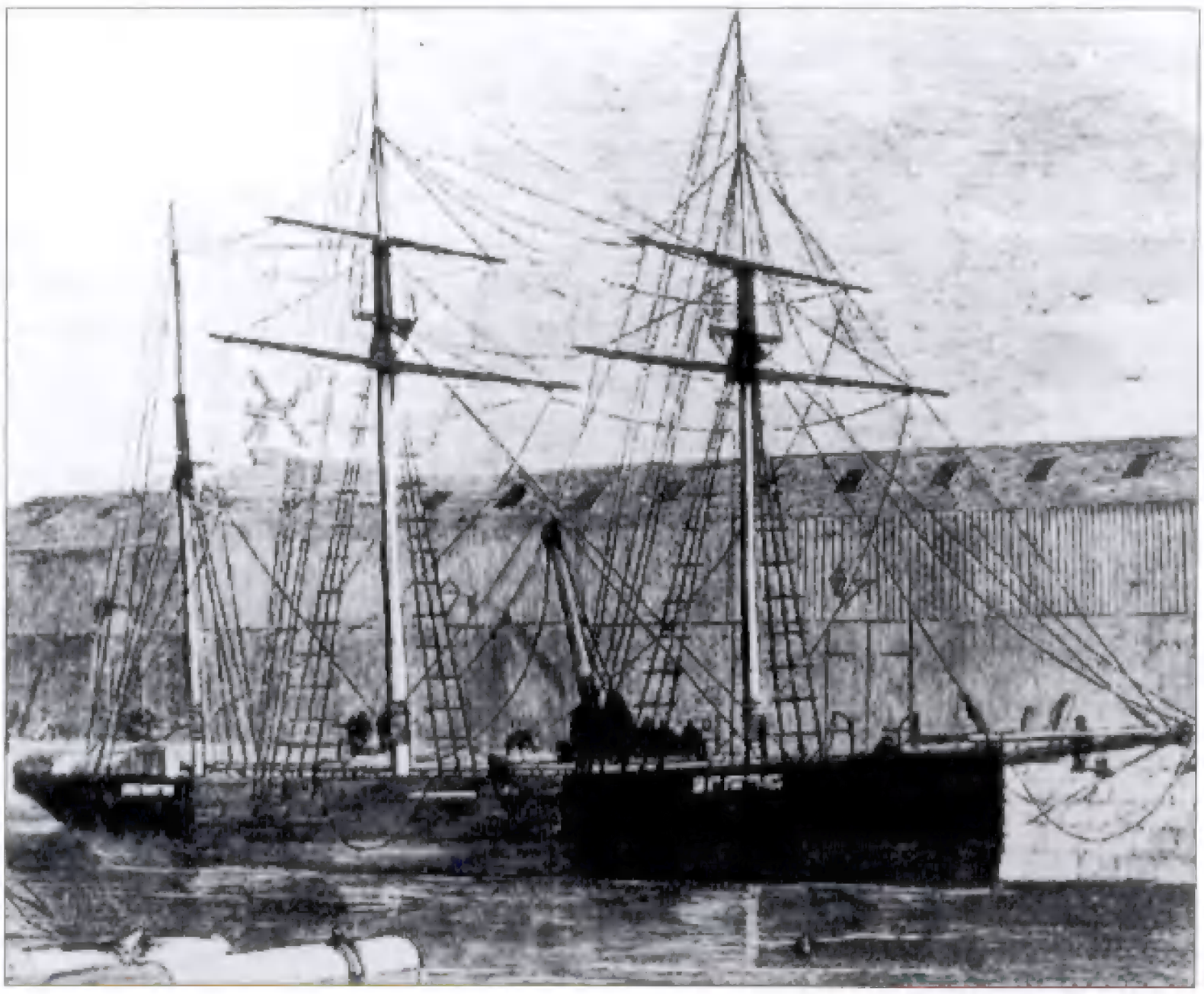
Although Stephen Mallory disliked the notion of privateering, the initial enthusiasm for such ventures forced the hand of the Confederate government soon after the outbreak of the war. The first privateering "letter of marque" was issued to a Georgia-based vessel in May 1861. A further 56 "letters of marque" were signed by President Davis, or his representatives during the war. The majority was issued during the summer of 1861. At first, privateering seemed an attractive option, as the Union blockade was little more than a nominal one, and Union shipping was still to be found off the coast of the Confederacy, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, the Bahamas Channel and the Florida Straits. Even the Mississippi River provided opportunity for privateers, and privateering vessels cruised as far north as they dared before the Union army fortified the upper reaches of the river.

The majority of seagoing privateers were small sailing vessels, often displacing less than 100 tons. Sailing barques and schooners were the primary size and type of privateer, and these were often provided with only a minimal armament. Larger steam privateers also existed, such as the sidewheel steamer *Phoenix*, which displaced over 1,600 tons, but

these were rare. Those first heady months of the war were profitable ones, but by the winter of 1861, the Union blockading fleets had become stronger, and coastal patrols were maintained in front of the smaller Southern ports. The majority of privateers were based in New Orleans, Charleston and Savannah, but the risks of operating from these ports increased each time a privateer tried to slip out to sea. Also, the nature of privateering entailed the capture of enemy ships, and the selling of both prize and cargo in a friendly port. It was bad enough for the privateer to run the blockade, but trying to do so with prizes in tow became nigh on impossible. The blockade also created a demand for blockade runners. Increasingly, ship owners favored the greater potential profits of this pursuit rather than privateering. By the end of 1862, there were virtually no privateers left in operation, and Stephen Mallory brought those few that remained under the authority of the Confederate Navy by forcing them into a "volunteer navy," under his own supervision. The use of privateers was not considered a great success, and, compared to the tonnage destroyed by commissioned Confederate commerce raiders, the damage they inflicted on Union shipping was minimal.



A pencil sketch of the Confederate raider *Shenandoah*, taken from the notebook kept by her Commanding Officer, Lieutenant James I. Waddell. This is probably the most accurate depiction of her extensive sail plan to be found. (CHC)



The barque-rigged steamer *Alexandra*, purchased in Liverpool for use as a commerce raider, but impounded by the British government in April 1863, before she could be used. One of several potential commerce raiders impounded by the authorities, she could have caused havoc amongst American shipping in European waters had she been commissioned. (Author's Collection)

GUNNERY

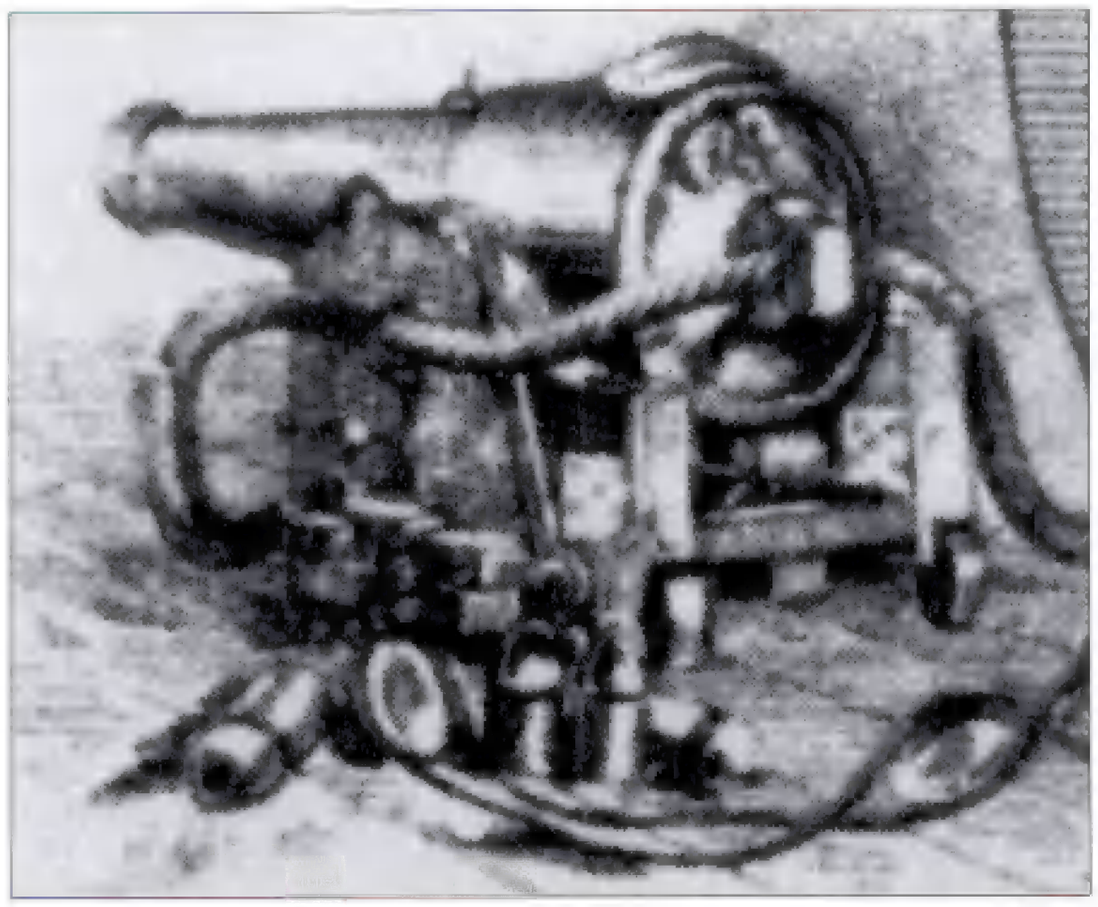
Other titles in the Osprey New Vanguard series have explored the subject of Civil War guns and gunnery in some depth, however, in many ways, the Confederate raiders were a different case. They were not designed to fight if they could avoid it, relying on speed both to overpower enemy merchant vessels and to escape Union warships. Gunnery was considered a last resort. In order to describe how the raiders employed their guns, and how effective they were, it is worth examining the well-documented example of the CSS *Alabama*, using her as a model for her eight compatriots.

The CSS *Alabama* was armed with two large pivot guns; a 7-in. (110-pdr.) rifled piece, and an 8-in. (68-pdr.) smoothbore gun. In addition, she carried a matched broadside armament of six 32-pdr. smoothbores, later augmented by two captured 24-pdr. rifled pieces. The broadside guns were aimed and fired just as naval guns had been for centuries; waiting until the target appeared within the arc of fire (which was limited by the gunport), then firing. The pivot guns were a new invention, designed to minimize the weight and crew requirements of mounting two heavy broadside guns. When the ship was cruising, the guns were aligned on the central axis of the ship, trained forward or aft as required. To train it at an enemy, the gun and carriage were moved to one of the two sides of the ship along a series of deck slides, resembling metal rail tracks. This was achieved by manhandling the gun around a series of pivot points, allowing it to move from one side of the ship to the centerline, then on to the opposite side if required. This all took time, and the one tactical limitation of the system was that once battle had joined, the guns were limited to firing from the side of the ship they had been moved to. In effect, they became broadside-mounted guns on one side of the ship.

The sinking of the Confederate privateer *Petrel*, after being overtaken by the powerful Union sailing frigate USS *St. Lawrence* on July 28, 1861. After the first year of the war, almost all privateering had ceased. (Author's Collection)

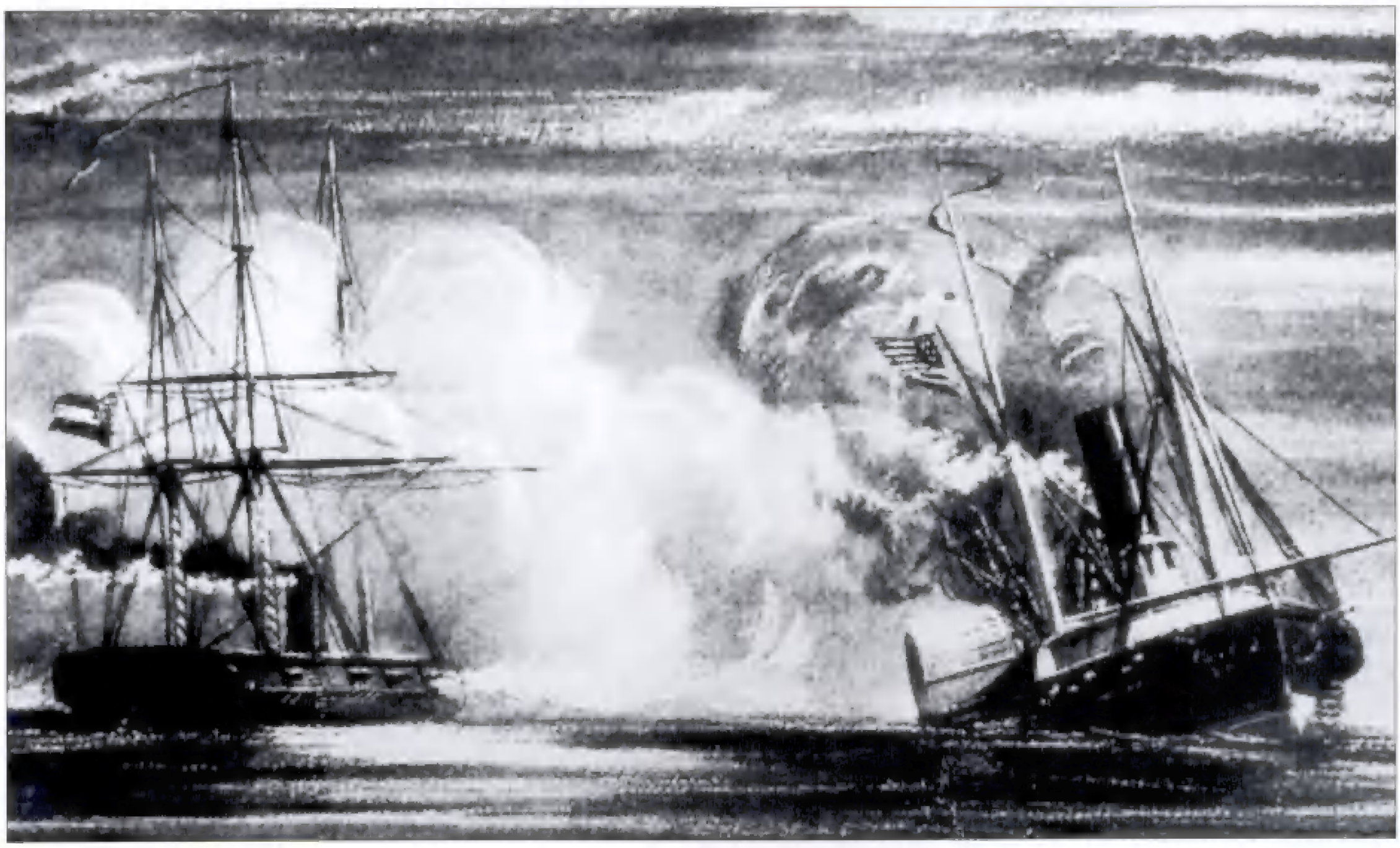
The CSS *Alabama* fought two gunnery actions: against the USS *Hatteras* off Galveston in January 1863, and against the USS *Kearsage* off Cherbourg on June 19, 1864. In the first action, she lured the Union gunboat into a three-hour chase, leading her away from her Union consorts. As dusk fell, Semmes turned the *Alabama* around, and closed within point-blank range of the *Hatteras*. Unsure as to the identity of his adversary, Commander Blake of the *Hatteras* hailed the mystery ship. At first, Semmes claimed to be the British warship HMS *Petrel*, but when Blake threatened to send a boat over, Semmes

called out "This is the Confederate States Steamer *Alabama*—Fire!" A single shot from a pivot gun flew over the *Hatteras*, then the rest of the broadside joined in. The ships were only 25 yards apart—well within musket range. Blake's attempts to board the *Alabama* were confounded, and slowly the Union gunboat was ripped apart by Confederate shot. The 7-in. Blakely rifle was particularly effective, and its 110-pdr. shot damaged the *Hatteras*' engine, and started fires. The *Alabama*'s paymaster described the effect of the raider's fire: "When the shells struck her side, and especially the percussion ones, her whole side was lit up and showing rents of five or six feet in length." By this stage the Union gunboat was clearly sinking, and both sides ceased firing as the Union sailors abandoned ship. The action had lasted a mere 13 minutes, the first engagement in which a steam warship had been sunk by another similar vessel.



A 32-pdr. smoothbore gun, of the type mounted as part of the broadside armament of the CSS *Alabama*, and other Confederate raiders. It is mounted on a standard Marsilly pattern carriage. (Author's collection).

In her second engagement, the *Alabama* and the *Kearsage* circled each other, as both had deployed their pivot guns on their starboard sides. In an action lasting an hour, the *Kearsage* demolished her adversary with her 11-in. Dahlgren smoothbores. The *Alabama*'s ammunition was largely defective after months at sea, and a 7-in. shell that hit the *Kearsage*'s vulnerable sternpost failed to explode. By contrast the *Kearsage* killed the crew of the *Alabama*'s rear pivot (her 8-in. smoothbore) at a range of 500 yards, and hit her engines. With his hull pierced below the waterline, his guns ineffective, and his engines losing pressure, Semmes was forced to surrender his ship, which sank shortly afterwards. It was a singularly



one-sided engagement, and an effective demonstration of the vulnerability of the Confederate raiders to well-armed and well-commanded Union cruisers.

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LEFT **Another contemporary representation of the fight between the CSS *Alabama* and the USS *Hatteras* (January 11, 1863); this rather inaccurate lithograph does convey an idea of the point-blank range at which the engagement was fought. The Union sidewheel gunboat is depicted sinking by her starboard side. (CHC)**

COLOR PLATE COMMENTARY

A1: CONFEDERATE PRIVATEER *CALHOUN*

Active from May 1861–January 1862
Prizes captured: 6

The *Calhoun* was typical of the small steamers that plied the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico in the decade preceding the outbreak of the Civil War. When Louisiana joined the new Confederacy in February 1861, a consortium of New Orleans businessmen purchased the *Calhoun*, planning to use her as a privateer. Three guns were added (at least, three guns were carried when the vessel was captured by the Union Navy ten months later), and in early May the syndicate were presented with a privateering "letter of marque." While dozens of privateers operated during the first year of the war, few were steam-powered, so the *Calhoun* enjoyed some degree of success. In her first month of operation she captured six prizes off the Mississippi Delta, including three New England whalers, but her privateering career ended there, as the Confederate Navy compulsorily purchased her to use as a river gunboat. Her inclusion here is to act as a representative of the scores of Confederate privateers that cruised in Southern coastal waters during 1861.

Builder: Samuel Sneeden's Yard, New York (1851)
Purchased: April 1861 (New Orleans)
Commissioned: As privateer, May 1861
Displacement: 508 tons
Dimensions: 124ft 4in. overall, 27ft 6in. beam, 11ft draft
Armament: One 30-pdr. rifle, two 32-pdr. smoothbores
Propulsion: Sidewheel propulsion Speed: Estimated at 11 knots Complement: 68
Fate: Captured in the Mississippi Delta, January 23, 1862

"The Fight between the *Alabama* and the *Kearsage*," an engraving from *Harper's Weekly*, 1864. Both ships fought the battle with their sails furled, as shown in this contemporary scene of the action off Cherbourg (June 19, 1864). The CSS *Alabama* is the vessel in the foreground. (Author's Collection).

A2: CSS *NASHVILLE*

Active from October 1861–March 1862
Prizes captured: 3

Although not the most successful of the Confederate raiders due to her combined commerce raiding and diplomatic missions, the *Nashville* became the first Confederate warship to fly the flag in European waters. Her arrival in Britain also coincided with the "*Trent* Affair," when the high-handed behavior of the commander of the USS *San Jacinto* after he stopped the British steamer *Trent* almost led to war between the United States and Great Britain. Consequently, the *Nashville* was well received when she arrived in Southampton. On her return to America, it was decided that she would be more useful as a blockade runner, and she was decommissioned.

Builder: Thomas Collyer Yard, New York (1853)
Converted: Summer 1861 (Charleston)
Commissioned: October 1861 (Charleston)
Displacement: 1,221 tons
Dimensions: 201ft overall, 30ft 3in. beam, 14ft 6in. draft
Armament: Two 12-pdr. smoothbores (possibly howitzers)
Propulsion: Sidewheel propulsion Speed: 10 knots
Complement: unrecorded
Fate: Decommissioned and sold in Beaufort, North Carolina, March 1862. Subsequently destroyed by the USS *Montauk*

B: THE CSS *FLORIDA*'S DESTRUCTION OF THE CLIPPER *JACOB BELL*, FEBRUARY 12, 1863

The CSS *Florida* enjoyed a fearsome reputation as a commerce raider, capturing almost 40 prizes during her two cruises. Of all these vessels, her most lucrative capture was the Union schooner *Jacob Bell*, which she intercepted off the Bahamas on February 12, 1863, two weeks into her maiden cruise. The *Jacob Bell* was a New York-based China clipper, one of the most elegant vessels of the period, and one of the fastest. She carried a cargo of tea, valued at over $1.5 million in contemporary prices, as well as some 10,000 boxes of Chinese firecrackers, destined to be sold before the Fourth of July celebrations that year. For the crew of the *Florida*, the celebrations came early, as Commander Maffitt ordered that the clipper be destroyed.

The plate depicts the encounter between the two vessels, and is fairly typical of the scene that was repeated hundreds of times by the Confederate raiders across the world's oceans. After stopping the enemy ship, the Confederate commander would send over a boat that would return with the ship's master and his papers. If the vessel was deemed a lawful prize, it would be destroyed. The enemy crew would be taken prisoner, to be landed at the nearest enemy port, or else cast adrift in the ship's boats and pointed in the direction of land. A Confederate boarding party would then set incendiary devices in the prize. The scene shows the

The wreck of the CSS *Florida* after the captured raider was sunk by an accidental collision in Hampton Roads, Virginia, on November 28, 1864. An inquiry ascertained that her loss was accidental. A Union monitor is shown on guard duty in the foreground. (Author's Collection)

boarding party returning to the *Florida*, and the fire catching hold on board the *Jacob Bell*.

C1: CSS *FLORIDA*

Active from August 1862–November 1864
Prizes captured: 33

Although the *Florida* was closely associated with her first commander, John Maffitt, ill health forced him to hand over his command to Lieutenant Charles M. Morris in January 1864. Morris commanded her during her successful second cruise, when 11 prizes were taken between March and September 1864. On the evening of October 4, the *Florida* entered Bahia (now Salvador), Brazil, to find another warship at anchor. After hailing it, he was assured it was a British gunboat, not a Union one. Morris had been duped, and at 3am, the mystery gunboat raised steam, and rammed the *Florida*, then backed off and opened fire. The mystery vessel was the USS *Wachusett*, and within 20 minutes her commander, Napoleon Collins, had forced Morris and his crew to surrender. This breach of Brazilian neutrality caused a major diplomatic incident, but Collins' initiative had removed one more predator from the high seas.

Builder: Archibald Denny's Yard, Dumbarton, Scotland (1861)
Purchased: March 1863 (Dumbarton)
Commissioned: April 9, 1863 (off Ushant)
Displacement: 690 tons Dimensions: 212ft overall, 27 beam, 13ft 9in. draft
Armament: Two 7-in. (100-pdr.) rifles, one 32-pdr. rifle, and two 24-pdr. smoothbores
Propulsion: Single screw-propulsion Speed: 13 knots
Complement: 75
Fate: Decommissioned and sold in Liverpool, May 1864

C2: CSS *GEORGIA*

Active from April 1863–May 1864
Prizes captured: 9

Originally the iron-hulled steamship SS *Japan*, the vessel was purchased in Scotland, then rendezvoused with the transport steamer *Alar* off the French peninsula of Ushant. Commissioned as the CSS *Georgia* under the command of Commander William Maury, this raider operated in the South Atlantic between the coast of Brazil and South Africa. She followed the main current flows used by sailing ships traveling between the Far East and America, and captured nine prizes. Unlike other raider captains, Commander William Maury remained reluctant to destroy captured ships, and many of his prizes were released, "on bond." The *Georgia* was a poor sailer, and her hull proved unsuitable for the warm semi-tropical waters. Consequently Maury aborted his cruise, and limped home to Cherbourg where his ship was condemned.

Builder: William Miller's Yard, Liverpool, Great Britain
Launched: January 1862
Commissioned: August 17, 1862 (off Bahamas)
Displacement: 700 tons Dimensions: 191ft overall, 27ft 3in. beam, 13 foot draft
Armament: Six 6-in. rifles, two 110-pdr. (7-in.) rifles, one 12-pdr. boat howitzer
Propulsion: Single screw-propulsion Speed: 9½ knots
Complement: 52 men
Fate: Captured by USS *Wachusett* off Bahia, Brazil, October 7, 1864. Subsequently sunk in collision off Newport News, Virginia, November 28, 1864.

D: CSS *ALABAMA*

Active from August 1862–June 1864
Prizes captured: 71

The CSS *Alabama* was the most famous, and the most successful, of all the confederate raiders. During her two-year cruise she captured over 70 enemy vessels, and sank a Union gunboat, before succumbing to the gunfire of the USS *Kearsage* off Cherbourg in June 1864.

Commanded by the gifted Raphael Semmes, his exploits, and those of his commerce raider, have become the stuff of legend. This, combined with the recent discovery of the wreck of the *Alabama*, has assured her place as one of the best-known warships of the period.

Builder: Laird's Yard, Birkenhead, Great Britain
Launched: May 15, 1862
Commissioned: August 24, 1862 (off Azores)
Displacement: 1,050 tons Dimensions: 220ft overall, 31ft 9in. beam, 14ft draft
Armament: One 110-pdr. (7in.) rifle, one 68-pdr. (8in.) smoothbore, six 32-pdr. (55-cal.) smoothbores.
Propulsion: Single screw-propulsion Speed: 13 knots
Complement: 138 men
Fate: Sunk in action with the USS *Kearsage* off Cherbourg in France, June 19, 1864

E1: CSS *SUMTER*

Active from June 1861–January 1862
Prizes captured: 18

The Confederate government purchased the bark-rigged steamer *Habana* (Havana) in April 1861, on the recommendation of Commander Raphael Semmes, the man who would become her first Confederate captain. On June 30, 1861 she sailed from the Mississippi Delta, narrowly avoiding a battle with the powerful steam frigate USS *Brooklyn*, who pursued her in a dramatic three-hour stern chase before she escaped. Although the *Sumter* was slow and not particularly seaworthy, Semmes used her to good effect, cruising through the Caribbean and the Mid Atlantic before reaching Spain in January 1864. The raider was eventually decommissioned and sold in Gibraltar, but Semmes and many of his crew went on to sail in the even more successful *Alabama*.

Builder: Vaughn and Lynn Yard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1857)
Converted: Spring, 1861 (New Orleans)
Commissioned: June 1861 (New Orleans)
Displacement: 437 tons Dimensions: 184ft overall, 30 beam, 12ft draft
Armament: one 8-in. rifle, four 32-pdr. smoothbores
Propulsion: Single screw-propulsion Speed: 10 knots
Complement: unrecorded
Decommissioned in Gibraltar, January 1862, and sold in December 1862

E2: CSS *RAPPAHANNOCK*

Never active
Prizes captured: 0

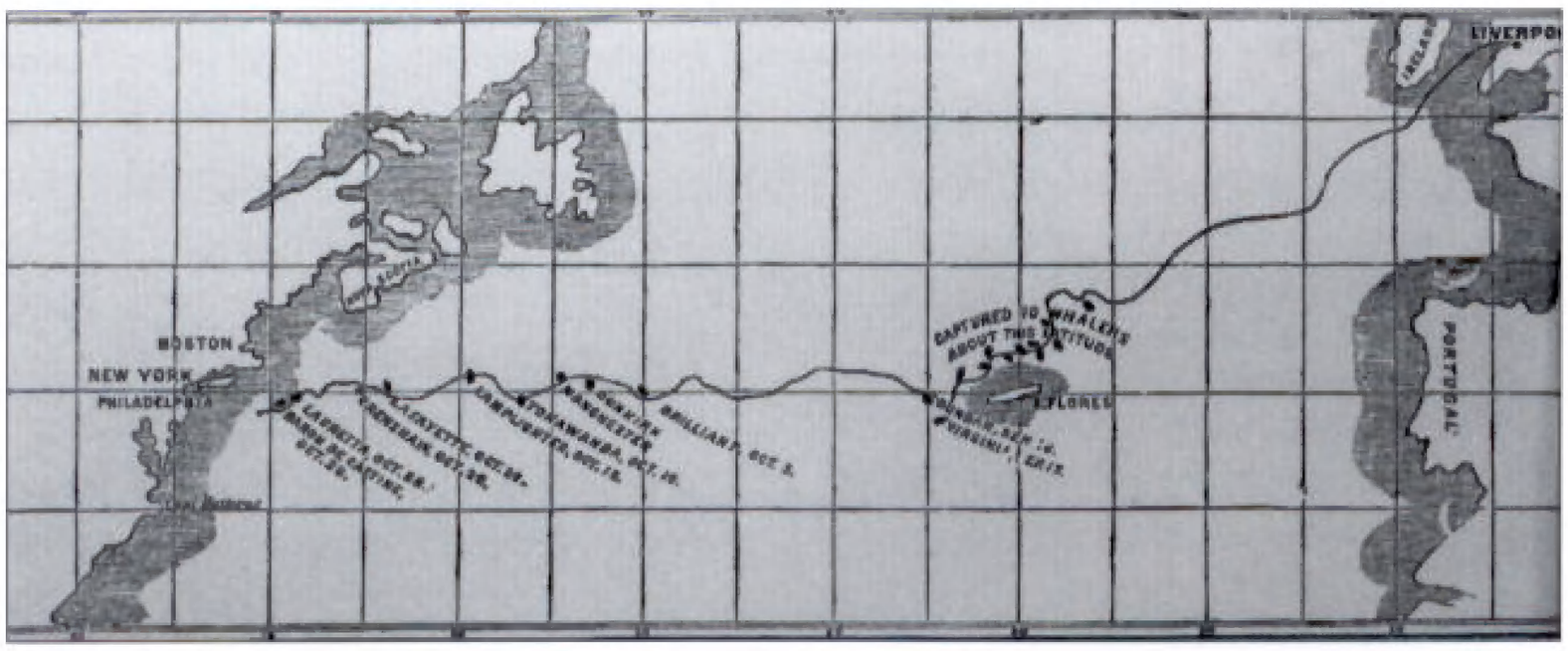
Originally built as a corvette for the Royal Navy in1857, HMS *Victor* proved an unsatisfactory warship, and was decommissioned in late 1863. Confederate agent Matthew F. Maury purchased her, but was forced to spirit the vessel away to sea when he learned that the British authorities were about to impound his ship. The *Victor* was plagued by mechanical problems, and engine failure left her drifting in the middle of the English Channel. Maury commissioned her CSS *Rappahannock*, and was permitted to enter the French port of Calais. The French authorities subsequently impounded her before she could be readied for sea. Given the powerful armament of the *Rappahannock*, if she had been put to sea, she would have been a formidable cruiser.

Builder: Mare & Co., Blackwall, Great Britain (1855)
Purchased: November 1863 (Chatham, England)
Commissioned: 24th November 1863 (off Calais, France)
Displacement: 1,042 tons
Dimensions: 201ft overall, 30ft 3in. beam, 14ft 6in. draft
Armament: Two 9-in. rifled guns
Propulsion: Single screw-propulsion Speed: 11 knots
Complement: 100 men
Fate: Seized by the French Government, February 1864

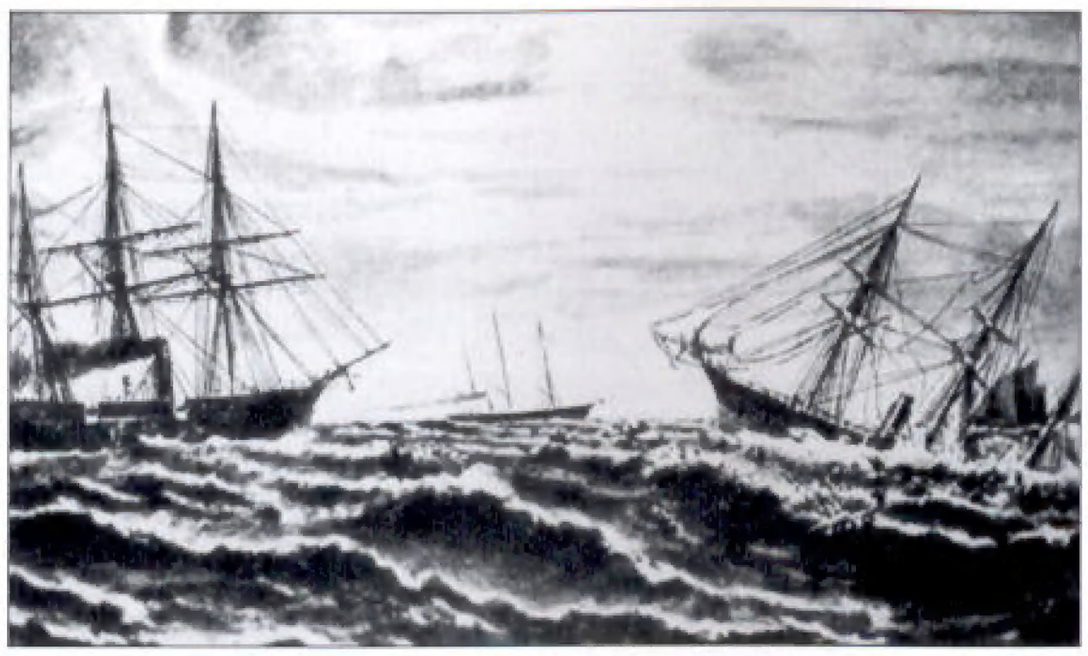
F: THE FIGHT OFF CHERBOURG, BETWEEN THE CSS *ALABAMA* AND THE USS *KEARSAGE*, JUNE 19, 1864

When the CSS *Alabama* put into the French port of Cherbourg for repair, spies reported her arrival to the US ambassador in Paris, who informed Captain John A. Winslow of the USS *Kearsage*, who was in the Dutch port of Flushing. Three days later, on June 15, 1864, the *Kearsage* arrived off Cherbourg to find the *Alabama* still in port. Captain Raphael Semmes realized that to delay his departure would give time for Union reinforcements to gather, so he sent a note to Winslow, informing him that he intended to sail as soon as practicable, and to fight a duel between the two warships.

Some 15,000 spectators watched the *Alabama* leave port around 10.00am on Sunday 19 June, and sail to meet the *Kearsage*, patrolling six mile off the coast. Although the armament of both ships was fairly evenly matched, the Dahlgren guns on the *Kearsage* were better suited to a short-range duel, and the *Alabama* had problems with faulty powder and shot. In a battle that lasted an hour, the two warships circled each other at varying ranges, before maintaining a distance of around 500 yards. The superior gunnery of the *Kearsage* proved decisive, and, with his ship sinking beneath him, Semmes ordered his crew to abandon ship. The *Alabama* sunk in 45 fathoms (270ft), and while the *Kearsage* captured numerous survivors, others (including Semmes) were spirited away by sympathetic British and French yachts



A chart printed in an 1862 edition of *Harper's Weekly* traces the transatlantic course of the CSS *Alabama*, showing the vessels she destroyed during the first two months of her cruise, off the Azores, and then off the Newfoundland Banks. (Author's Collection)



The final moments of the Confederate raider *Alabama*, after her fight with the USS *Kearsage* off Cherbourg, June 19, 1864. The British yacht *Deerhound*, seen approaching the *Alabama*, proceeded to rescue Semmes and many of his crewmen before the *Kearsage* could intervene. (CHC)

and pilot boats. The plate depicts the early stages of the battle, when the two ships were less than 250 yards apart.

Builder: Portsmouth Naval Yard, Maine
Laid Down: May 1861
Commissioned: January 24, 1862
Displacement: 1,550 tons
Dimensions: 198ft 6in. overall, 33ft 10in. beam, 15ft 9in. draft
Armament: Two 11-in. Dahlgren smoothbores, four 32-pdr. smoothbores, one 30-pdr. rifle, one 12-pdr. smoothbore (possibly a howitzer)
Propulsion: Single-screw propulsion Speed: 11 knots
Complement: 160 men
Fate: Survived the war, but wrecked off the South American coast in 1894

G1: CSS *TALLAHASSEE* (LATER KNOWN AS THE CSS *OLUSTEE)*

Active from August 1863–November 1864
Prizes captured: 39

A former British blockade runner, the CSS *Tallahassee* broke through the union fleet blockading Wilmington to harry Union shipping off the coasts of New York and New England. Her captain, John Taylor Wood, had the good fortune to capture a pilot boat off Fire Island, on the approaches to Long Island Sound. He used this vessel to decoy shipping entering or leaving New York Harbor within range of his raider. At one point, he even contemplated going (in his words) "up the East River, setting fire to the shipping on both sides, and when abreast of the Navy Yard, to open fire, hoping some of the shells might set fire to the buildings, and any vessels that might at the docks, and finally to steam through Hell Gate into the (Long Island) Sound." Neither his crew nor the pilots he captured were willing to undertake the daring plan, and the fire-eating Lieutenant Wood had to content himself with single-handedly decimating that season's New England fishing fleet.

Builder: Dudgeon's Yard, Millwall, Great Britain (1863)
Purchased: June 1864 (Wilmington)
Commissioned: July 20, 1864 (Wilmington)
Displacement: 546 tons
Dimensions: 250ft overall, 23ft 6" beam, 13ft 42 draft
Armament: One 84-pdr. rifle, two 32-pdr. smoothbores, two 24-pdr. smoothbores
Propulsion: Twin screw-propulsion Speed: 14 knots
Complement: 120 men
Fate: Turned into a blockade runner

G2: CSS *SHENANDOAH*

Active from October 1864–November 1865
Prizes captured: 47

The last of the Confederate raiders, the *Shenandoah* is perhaps best known for continuing to harass American whaling fleets in the Pacific Ocean long after the end of the war. Her captain (Lieutenant James Waddell) only learned that the Confederacy had given up on August 2, 1865, some four months after General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army at Appomattox. Just before he heard the news, Waddell was planning to use the *Shenandoah* to attack San Francisco.

She was also the only one of the Confederate raiders to have circumnavigated the world during the war, and her decimation of the New England fishing fleet caused losses in excess of $2 million; a catastrophe from which the American whaling industry would never recover. This Scottish-built iron-hulled ship proved to be extremely seaworthy, and was even capable of smashing her way through Arctic ice floes when Waddell sailed through the Bering Sea.

Builder: Stephen and Sons Yard, Govan, Scotland (1863)
Purchased: September 1864 (London)
Commissioned: October 19, 1864 (off Madeira)
Displacement: 1,160 tons
Dimensions: 230ft overall, 32ft beam, 20ft 6in. draft
Armament: One 84-pdr. rifle, two 32-pdr. smoothbores, two 24-pdr. smoothbores
Propulsion: Single screw-propulsion Speed: 9 knots
Complement: 73 men
Fate: Survived the war, and surrendered to the British government, November 6, 1865

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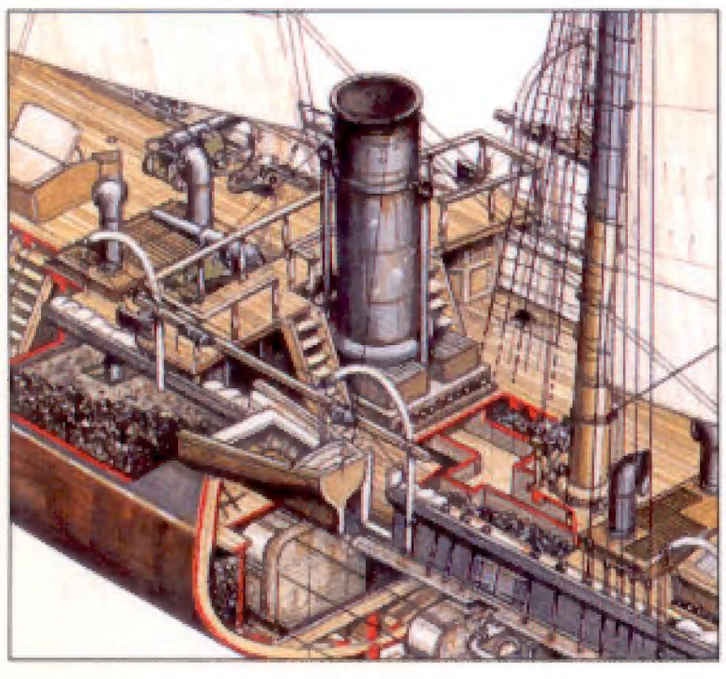

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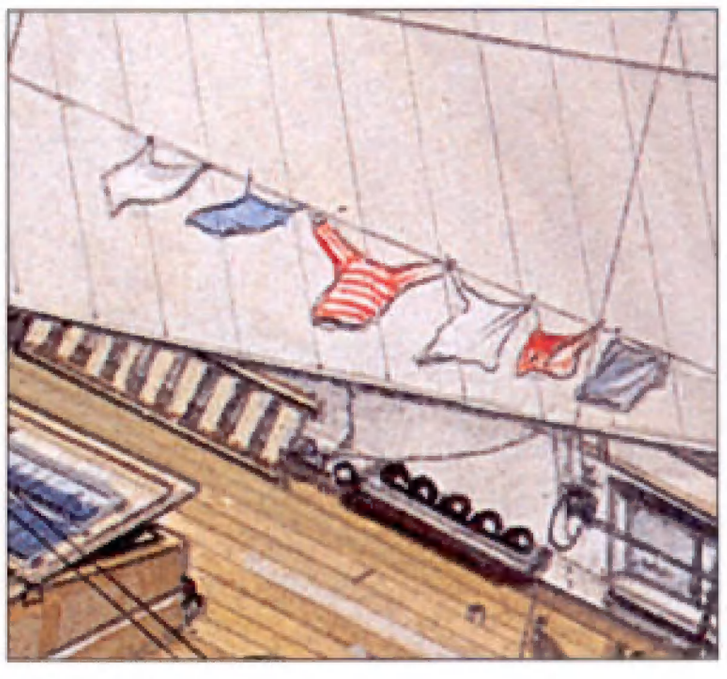

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